

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1875.

A SECRET OF THE SEA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PRINGLE'S DISCOVERY.

GREAT was the glee of Jonas Pringle when he found himself left alone once more in Spur Alley. When he saw Van Duren off in a cab for Euston Square he mentally bade him good-bye for ever.

So elated was he, so sure did he now feel that the moment of success was at hand, that he went out and bought a tin of preserved lobster, and a bottle of rum, and there and then held high festival with Bakewell and his wife in their dungeon below stairs. He calculated that, at the very soonest, Van Duren need not be expected back for three or four days; and what might not be accomplished even in that short time! He could not labour much during the day at perfecting his duplicate key: he had too many interruptions: he was wanted too frequently in the office by people who called to inquire after Van Duren. But after business hours, when the hush of evening crept over the busy city, then he could work away as long as he liked without fear of interruption. And surely, after all that had gone before, a few short hours only would now be needed to place the long-coveted prize in his grasp.

All that day he remained very restless and unsettled, and seemed unable either to stay long in any one place, or to fix his mind on anything for more than a few minutes at a time. Van Duren had left him several important letters to write, but after getting as far as the date and "Dear Sir," or "Gentlemen," with one or other of them, his ideas became so mixed up and confused that he could no longer disentangle the subject of one letter from that of another in his thoughts; so that at last he had to fling down his pen in disgust, and rush off for

a quarter of an hour to a favourite haunt round the corner. Indeed, he seemed to be running in and out, all day long.

Pringle made up his mind that, if requisite, he would work away at his key all night. When Bakewell and his wife were safe in bed—and they rarely sat up after ten o'clock—he would steal downstairs without his shoes, turn on the gas, and shut himself up in the strong-room; and there, file in hand, and a fresh bottle of rum by his side, he could work on in safety till five or six o'clock next morning.—But perhaps before that time the stubborn lock would yield and the great door fall back on its hinges, and then!—But such a possibility was almost too much for calm consideration.

Before beginning his work for the night, he would go down to a little water-side tavern that he knew of, where the *Shipping Gazette* could always be found, together with sundry lists of vessels about to sail from London and other ports. He had not yet decided on the spot to which he should direct his flight, but he could make up his mind on that important point to-night, and pick out the names and dates of sailing of some half-dozen ships, so as to be ready for an emergency at any minute.

As it happened, however, the evening turned out so wet and stormy that Pringle was obliged to put off his proposed visit to the river-side tavern till another day. This altered his plans a little. Instead of waiting till Bakewell and his wife were in bed, as soon as he had shut the office and hurriedly swallowed a cup of tea, he went to his own room and locked himself in, and set to work at once with his file. But he was afraid to go on working too long at a time without trying the key in the lock. At any moment his file might give the one last touch, which, Pringle felt convinced, was all that his key now needed to make him at once master of the situation. So, at intervals of half an hour or so, he stole downstairs to the strong-room to try his key once more; and once more, on finding that the master-touch had not yet been given, he stole back to his own room and set to work again with a slow, quiet patience that would not know what it was to feel itself beaten.

To-night, for a wonder, it was nearly eleven before the Bakewells went to bed. As soon as he felt sure that there was no longer anything to fear from them, Pringle removed himself permanently downstairs for the night. Seating himself on a pile of books close by the iron door, he went quietly on with his work. At half-past eleven he tried the key in the lock, but, for aught he could tell to the contrary, he might have been no nearer success than he had been a month previously. He tried again as the clocks were chiming the quarter before midnight, and the wards of the lock yielded and fell back as readily and smoothly as ever they had done before Van Duren's own key. The master-touch had been given at last.

Pringle, sitting on his heap of books, stared at the open door as though he could not believe the evidence of his senses. Was it, could

it be possible that the golden prize for which he had laboured so long and so patiently was at last really within his grasp? His hands were all a-tremble, his head was burning, his mouth parched up. All at once it struck him that he felt very thirsty and that it was close upon twelve o'clock. There would be time for one, or even for two, last tumblers before the taverns closed. Where would he be before midnight should strike again? Not in London, he said to himself, but miles out at sea on his way to some far-off land.

With some such thoughts as these flitting fitfully through his mind, he mechanically lowered the gas, and then leaving the safe-door still open, but closing and locking the door of the room, he crept cautiously up the stone staircase, with his shoes in his hand, and let himself out at the front door with as little noise as possible. He had made no attempt to examine the contents of the safe. A brief glance into it had satisfied him for the time being. He knew for an undoubted fact that the money he coveted was there, and he asked to know nothing more. There was no fear that it would take to itself wings while he went to have a final glass at his favourite tavern.

The final glass was duly imbibed, and at five minutes past twelve Jonas Pringle found himself in the streets again and on his way back to Spur Alley. He was nearly at home, when suddenly his eyes fell on the figure of a woman who was standing full in the light of a street lamp, and apparently counting some money. There was something in the outline or attitude of the woman that sent a strange thrill to his heart. With a half-inarticulate cry, he hurried forward. Startled by his sudden movement, the woman looked up, and her haggard face became clearly visible in the lamplight.

"Jessie!—my daughter!" exclaimed Pringle, and he sprang forward as though he would clutch her.

"Father!" cried the woman, in a voice of shrill, sharp agony, as she suddenly flung up her arms. Then, before he could touch her, she turned and fled.

"Jessie—Jessie! Don't run away from me!" cried Pringle, as he hurried after her. But he was no match for the fleet-footed woman in front of him. By the time he got to the corner of the street he was completely exhausted, and Jessie was already out of sight. He leaned for a moment or two against the wall, with a hand pressed to his side, while he gathered breath. Then, with a bitter sigh, he retraced his way slowly towards Spur Alley. "Found at last," he muttered to himself, as he stumbled painfully along—"found at last, but only to lose her again at the moment of finding! I would have forgiven everything—yes, everything, if she would only have come back to me!" During the last few minutes, he had forgotten all about the safe and its contents, and the treasure that lay ready to his hand; but now, as he proceeded to open the street door with his latch-key, the whole situation came

back to his mind in a rush, but with a sense of strangeness as though something done by some other man, or by himself long years before.

The house was as dark and silent as a tomb. He groped his way downstairs, and presently he found himself in the strong-room again. He sat down on the heap of books, to think. To-night, of all nights in his life, he had seen again the daughter for whom he had been searching for years. He had seen her one moment, but only to lose her the next. She had fled from him, desperately determined to avoid him ; and the chances were that, in that great wilderness of London, they should never meet again. His heart yearned towards her as it had never yearned before, but all her desire seemed to be to shun him. The question with him now was, whether he should take this money which lay ready to his hand, and go away for ever ; or whether he should relock the safe, leaving the money untouched, and go on living his old life as if this dream of sudden wealth had never haunted his mind, and devote all his spare hours, as he had done years before, to searching for his lost child, who, as to-night had proved, was so near to him and yet so far away. The chances were that he should never see Jessie again ; and even if he should succeed in finding her, he had no proof that she would not elude him again as she had done already. If only he could have felt sure of finding her, and that she would stay with him when found, not ten times the amount of money in Van Duren's safe would have tempted him to leave London, and with it his last chance of ever seeing her again.

His thoughts were all in a maze of confusion. He could not make up his mind what to do. Springing to his feet, he flung wide the door of the safe. He would at least feast his eyes on this treasure for which he had braved so much and laboured so long. There would still be time to decide afterwards what he should finally do.

There were several iron drawers in the safe, all of them unlocked. These he opened one after another. One of them was full of small bags of specie, each of which was neatly tied up and labelled, to show the value of its contents. Another drawer contained bank-notes, drafts, and bills of exchange. Other receptacles held promissory notes, bills of sale, and various documents having a bearing on Van Duren's business. Pringle paused for a moment or two while he made a rapid calculation. In gold and notes alone, the safe held upwards of three thousand pounds. His most sanguine hopes were more than realized. Should he take this money and go, or should he not ? At six o'clock that very morning he could drop down the river in an outward-bound ship, and all trace of him would be lost for ever. But to leave Jessie !

There was one last drawer still to open. He drew it slowly out. It held neither gold, nor notes, nor bills of exchange. There was nothing in it but a small cedar-wood box, which box was locked. Pringle took it out of the drawer. It was very light, and not at all strong. What

could there be inside it? Why should the contents of this box be held as of more account than the gold and notes that lay openly about?—Perhaps within that little casket lay hidden some dark secret of Van Duren's life. With the aid of one of his files, which lay there on the floor, Pringle could force open the lid in a couple of minutes, and see with his own eyes what was shut up inside. No sooner thought than done—done without pausing to ask himself whether such an act would not shut him out from all possible mode of retreat. So long as the box remained intact, so long as the gold and notes remained untouched, all that he had to do was to shut and relock the door of the safe, and Van Duren need never know anything of what had happened to-night.

But the lid of the box was forced even while this thought was floating vaguely through his mind. He forced it, breaking it into two pieces as he did so. To his intense disappointment, there was nothing inside but a parcel of old letters.

Yes, at the very bottom there was something more, and yet nothing of any great consequence: only a woman's portrait. He took it up with a sneer, and moved a few steps nearer the gaslight, so as to be able to examine it more closely.

For a full minute he stood staring at the portrait without moving a muscle, with no more apparent life in him than a waxen effigy. Then he let the portrait drop as suddenly as though it had burnt him, and putting his hands to his face, he sank on his knees beside it on the floor. But not long did he remain thus. With a low cry, he started to his feet as though suddenly struck by some overwhelming thought, and hurrying across the floor, he pulled out the drawer that held the letters, and went back with it to the light. Holding the drawer under one arm, he picked out a letter here and there, opened it, read a line or two, glanced at the signature, and then put it back and took up another. Last of all, he picked up the portrait, kissed it, laid it atop of the letters, and put the drawer back into its place in the safe. Then once more he sat down to think.

What a strange and terrible discovery was that which he had just made! The likeness was Jessie's likeness, and the letters were Jessie's letters. Max Van Duren was the villain who had robbed him of his child.

Nineteen men out of twenty would have destroyed the letters of a girl for whom they had ceased to care, and whom they had cast upon the world without compunction, to starve, or die, or to live on in a way that was worse than death. But here the letters were. They had been written in the days when Jessie was his "wild rose," when she had believed him to be everything that was good and honourable; when, at his persuasion, and for love of him, she had run away from the drunken, disreputable father who seemed to value her so little, but who found out how dear the motherless girl was to his heart when he lost her for

ever." Yes; here were the letters, overflowing with sweet, girlish confidence and outspoken love. Who could tell why Van Duren had kept them? Not he himself, if anyone had put the question to him.

Jonas Pringle had need to think. He heard the City clocks strike one, as he sat on the pile of ledgers by the open door of the safe, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands. He heard the City clocks strike two, and still he sat like a man turned to stone.

When, years before, he had first come to London, and had reason to believe that his daughter was hidden somewhere in the same huge wilderness, all his spare time for many weary months had been devoted to looking for her. But that could not go on for ever: and although he had long ago given up all active search for Jessie, the trick, acquired at that time, of peering up into the face of every woman who passed him in the streets, had never wholly left him. Thousands of times had he dwelt in imagination on the meeting which, he felt convinced, must one day take place between his daughter and himself—how he would snatch her to his heart and tell her that all the past was dead and forgiven. And now he had seen her, but only to find that she shunned him as though he were stricken with the plague. A thousand times had he sworn to himself that should he ever knowingly cross the path of the man who had destroyed his child, no power in heaven or on earth should balk him of his revenge. And now that by a strange chance he had crossed the path of that man, should his oaths be all forgotten, and the revenge he had promised himself nothing but an empty dream? Not so, not so.

But what form should his vengeance take? Not the poor, paltry, insignificant form of robbing this man of his gold. After what he had learned to-night, rather than take a penny of his money, he would have begged from door to door. What he wanted was, not Van Duren's money, but Van Duren's life. He would like to have seen him come home the worse for wine, and in that condition have gone to bed, and then have set fire to the house and have burnt him as he slept. He would like to have treated him as some savage tribes treat their prisoners—torturing them hour after hour, killing them by inches through a long summer day. A death that would come quickly was too good for him. Something slow and lingering, something that would make him long for death as a prisoner longs for the order for his release, would not be one whit more than he, and all such as he, deserved.

At length he heard the clocks strike four, and he knew that the bright May dawning was beginning to flood the streets with the grey and gold of another day. Then he stood up, stiff, cold, and weary, but with an intense fire burning at his heart that seemed to light him up from head to foot, and had already transformed him into another man. He put out the gas, and leaving the safe door still

unlocked, but locking the outer door, he crept upstairs to bed. He had matured his plan; he had thought-out his scheme of revenge; everything was clearly mapped out in his mind: he could now afford to take a few hours' sleep.

He came down at his usual hour, washed, shaven, and brushed more carefully than common, and had breakfast with the Bakewells. He was very chatty and affable over the meal, and entertained them with a long and elaborate narrative of the latest murder, so that they all enjoyed themselves greatly. An hour later, after the post letters had arrived, he called Bakewell into the office.

"I have just got a letter from the governor," said Pringle, "in which he tells me that he shall not be back home for a fortnight, or even longer. So, as you and your better half will have little or nothing to do during that time, he thinks you may as well take advantage of his absence and have a run out to the seaside, or down into the country, for a couple of weeks. And what do you think he has done? He has opened his heart as I never knew him to open it before, and has actually asked me to give you five pounds towards paying your expenses while you are away. Bakewell, what a lucky dog you are!"

Bakewell was staggered by the news of his good fortune, as Pringle had perhaps intended that he should be; nor was his wife less overcome when told of it. However, they were nothing loth to go for a holiday on such terms; and so well did Pringle work upon them, and hurry forward their arrangements, that at six o'clock that evening he had the satisfaction of seeing them drive away to the station, and of finding himself left the sole inmate of the big, gloomy house in Spur Alley.

This was what he wanted. He wanted to wait there, all alone, for the return of Van Duren. He went about his business as at ordinary times, but he hardly tasted drink at all. Neither did he sleep much. Of an evening he would sit all alone in Mrs. Bakewell's underground kitchen, smoking a long clay pipe, moistening his mouth now and then with a little cold tea, and now and then smashing a stray beetle. He would sit thus, his feet perched on the chimney-piece, listening to the clocks as they struck hour after hour, thinking his own dark thoughts, and waiting for the coming of Max Van Duren.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FOUND LETTER.

It was evening—the evening of the day on which Matthew Kelvin had sent his brief note to Dr. Whitaker, making an appointment with him for half-past eleven next morning. He had desired to be left alone for

an hour, and during that time he had contrived, with several intervals of rest, for his weakness was very great, to write a longer letter than had come from his pen since the first day of his illness. This letter, duly sealed and directed, now lay on the little table by his bedside. The address on it was very short, being simply—"Miss Lloyd, Stammers."

By-and-by Mrs. Kelvin came up into the room. As she did so, her son quietly thrust the letter under his pillow. The old lady came to the bedside, and beamed on him through her spectacles, as he lay there with his arms crossed under his head. "Why, Matthew, my dear boy, I have not seen you look so bright and well for many a long day as you have looked during the last few hours! You have got the turn at last. I feel sure you have. I knew that Dr. Druce would bring you round again after a time."

"Yes, mother, I think I have got the turn at last, as you say," answered Kelvin, gravely. "We will never let anyone say a word against Dr. Druce again, will we?"

"Ah, he's very, very clever," said the old lady. Then she stooped and kissed him, and as she did so, Matthew's arm stole round her neck, and pressed her head gently on his shoulder, and kept it there some minutes. When he let her go, she saw that there were tears in his eyes; but she was too wise to notice them, and she began at once to talk as though his recovery now were merely the question of a few days, or a week at the most.

"But I shall not let you go back to business till you are quite strong," she said. "Don't tell me that your not doing so will cost you a great deal of money. I don't care if it costs a thousand pounds: what is that in comparison with your health? You must have a month at the seaside, at some cheerful place—Boulogne or Dieppe, where you won't have time to grow melancholy. And if Olive and I go with you, we shall not bore you overmuch with our society, but only be there to see that you take proper care of yourself, and do not poison yourself with those French dinners of which you are so fond."

"I'm sure Olive deserves a holiday as much as anyone," resumed Mrs. Kelvin, a moment or two later. "What I should have done without her all this long time that you have been ill, I'm sure I don't know. She must be very fond of you, Matthew, to have done what she has done. Now, don't you think she is fond of you?"

"Yes, I suppose she is fond of me—after a cousinly fashion," said Matthew, coldly.

"Ah! you men!" sighed the old lady. "Whatever sacrifices a woman may make for you, in your own hearts you never think they are half as much as you deserve."

At this moment there came a tap at the door, and Olive entered the room. She brought her cousin a basin of arrowroot, which he, re-

remembering his promise to Dr. Whitaker, resolved not to touch. His eyes followed her curiously as she moved about the room. "I cannot—no, I cannot believe it!" he murmured under his breath. "There must be some damnable mistake somewhere."

"I have just been telling Matthew that I have not seen him look so well for weeks as he looks to-night," said Mrs. Kelvin to Olive. "We shall soon have have him all right again now."

Olive started, and threw a quick, suspicious glance at the sick man. He was looking at her very gravely but very kindly as she thought. "No: he suspects nothing, or he would not look at me in that way," she said to herself. Then her black brows separated and her face broke into a smile. "I really believe he is better," she said to her aunt. "I believe he has only been shamming all this time, and now he is getting tired of it. I should not be a bit surprised to see him come down to breakfast to-morrow."

"I'd almost stake my life that Whitaker is making some strange blunder!" muttered Kelvin to himself. "However, I'll carry out his instructions, and let to-morrow prove to him how wrong he is."

Olive was anxious that he should drink his arrowroot. He just put a spoonful to his lips, and then put it aside as being too hot. "Come in again after my mother has gone," he contrived to whisper to her. Then he lay back and shut his eyes, and presently both his mother and Olive bade him good night and left the room.

As soon as Mrs. Kelvin was gone to her own room, Olive came quietly back. She was on the tip-toe of expectation to know what her cousin could have to say to her. He did not keep her long in doubt.

"Olive," he said, "I have been writing a letter this evening—a letter which I want you to deliver for me to-morrow morning."

"Very well, Matthew. You know that I am entirely at your service. To whom is the letter addressed?"

"To Eleanor Lloyd."

"Ah!—then you have made up your mind at last to tell her everything?"

"I have made up my mind to tell her this: that I have discovered that she is not the daughter of Jacob Lloyd, and, consequently, not entitled to his property. But I have not made up my mind to tell her that I've known this fact for more than six months, and have concealed it purposely from her. I cannot tell her that."

"But why do you wish me to take the letter? Why not send through the post?"

"Because I am too weak at present to put down in writing more than the barest outline of the facts, and I want you to supplement by word of mouth what my letter fails to convey."

"Why not wait till you are a little stronger—till you can tell her, in person, all that it is necessary she should be told?"

"Not one day longer will I wait. Eleanor Lloyd shall know the great secret of her life before she is twenty-four hours older."

"As you will. Perhaps you are right," said Olive, quietly. "There is no reason why Miss Lloyd should be kept in ignorance any longer."

"None whatever. I don't remember anything in my life that I have ever regretted so bitterly as not having told Eleanor at first. But it is useless to speak of the past. The future is all we can now deal with."

"Then your feeling of resentment towards Miss Lloyd has an existence no longer?"

"It is wholly dead. A sick-bed alters one's views and feelings in many ways. How can a man have room in his heart for any petty jealousies or resentments when he sees the shades of death closing slowly round him? To me all such feelings now seem as strange as though they were those of another man, about which I had read somewhere, and had never been a portion of my own inner life."

Olive longed to ask him whether his love for Eleanor was dead equally with his resentment, but she was afraid that the old wound might not yet be altogether healed.

"Then you wish me to go to Stammers to-morrow?" she said.

"I do. Miss Lloyd is there at present. I had a letter from Sir Thomas this morning, in which he casually mentions that fact. You had better start early—not later than ten or half-past, by which means you will get your business over by luncheon time. Of course you will seek a private interview with Miss Lloyd, and not say a word to either Sir Thomas or Lady Dudgeon about your errand. Eleanor must be left to break the news to them in her own way and at her own time."

"It will be a bitter task to have to do so."

"It will indeed, poor girl! Cannot you understand, Olive, my chief reason for wanting you to go to Stammers?"

"You have told me already, have you not?"

"I have told you one reason, but not the only one. You are a woman, Olive, and I want you to break this news to Eleanor, to whom, in any case, it must come as a terrible shock. You do not like her, I know—at least, I judge so from what you have said at different times. But this is not a question of likes or dislikes. It is a question of one woman being overwhelmed by a great trouble, and of another woman smoothing away the sharp edge of that trouble with a little sympathy and kindness—articles which cost so little, but, at such seasons, mean so much. This is all I ask you to do, Olive; this is my other reason for sending you to Stammers. Am I asking more than you care to perform?"

"Certainly not, Matthew. It is not much that you ask me to do."

"But it means a great deal."

"How little men understand about us women!" thought Olive.

"None of my own sex, who knew the circumstances of the case, would ever have dreamed of asking me to do what Matthew has asked me to do, and believes I will do."

"Think what a revelation my letter will be!" continued the lawyer. "At one fell blow she will be robbed of name, wealth, and position. Think, and pity her."

He lay back, exhausted by the exertion of having spoken so much.

"What can I give you?" asked Olive. "Will you not have your arrowroot?"

"No: I will take that later on. A little weak brandy-and-water is all I need at present."

"And now I must bid you good night," said Olive, as soon as he had revived a little.

He put the letter into her hand, and as he did so he drew her towards him and kissed her. "I should like you to start about ten in the morning," he said. She promised to be ready by that time, and then she went.

"Whitaker's suspicion is nothing but a horrible nightmare," he said to himself, as Olive left the room. "He is wrong—utterly wrong." But for all that, Matthew Kelvin hardly slept a wink all night.

Olive took the letter to her room, locked the door, and then, after deliberating for a few moments, she quietly tore open the envelope and read what was inside. "If it be requisite to deliver the letter, I can put it into another envelope, and no one will be any the wiser," she said to herself. "If I decide not to deliver it, then another envelope will not be needed."

"A thoroughly business-like document," she said to herself as she folded up the letter, "and such as any lawyer might write to any lady. If there is no resentment in it, neither is there any love. The resentment is dead without a doubt, but is the love dead also? Query. Well, I will take the letter with me: there will be no harm in doing that: but it by no means follows that Miss Lloyd will ever read it. How easy it will be to pretend that I have lost it, and then I can tell the story my own way—with a sting in it, and before witnesses too, if such thing be anyhow possible. Oh! to see her humiliation! that will pay for everything."

She was up betimes next morning, and ready to start for Stammers soon after ten o'clock. In answer to her anxious inquiries, her cousin declared that he was much as usual—neither better nor worse. "You will try your best to soften the blow, won't you, Olive?" were Matthew's last words to her.

"You know that I will do my best," she said, with one of her faint smiles. She laid her thin fingers in his hand for a moment, and then she went.

By-and-by came Dr. Whitaker. Pod succeeded in smuggling him

upstairs unseen by anyone, and then took up a position in the corridor outside to keep away any would-be intruders. Mrs. Kelvin, especially, was to be kept out of the room. Were she to find out that her son was closeted with Dr. Whitaker, she would imagine at once that there was a conspiracy afoot to dispense with the services of her favourite, Dr. Druce. Fortunately she was busy downstairs just about that time, and did not go near. Matthew had said that he fancied a certain sort of pudding—an elaborate pudding, which Mrs. Kelvin was positive that no one but herself could make properly—a pudding, as her son was quite aware, that would require her undivided attention for at least a couple of hours below stairs.

Mr. Pod Piper, keeping watch and ward outside his master's door, had a long corridor all to himself, up and down which he could march as though he were a sentry on duty. After a time, from a door at the extreme end, there issued a pert-looking damsel, who smiled sweetly on Pod. In one hand she carried a broom, in the other a dust-pan.

"Ah, Molly, and how are you this morning?" said Pod, with the air of a duke addressing a dependent. "Blooming as ever, I see."

"I'm quite well, Mr. Piper, and I hope you are the same," answered Molly, with a little blush. Then she added, with a confidential air, "I've got such a beautiful rose downstairs. You shall have it for your button-hole, if you'll promise to wear it."

"I'll wear it for your sake, Molly. But whose room is that that you have just come out of?"

"Oh, that's Miss Deane's room. I've just been tidying it up a bit while she's out of the way."

"You like her, of course? Everybody likes Miss Deane."

"Then everybody's welcome to like her.—She's too sly for me.—But, see, I found this letter when I was sweeping just now behind her dressing-table. It must have slipped down without her knowing it. It's been opened; but as it's got master's name on it, I hardly know whether to leave it where I found it or to let master have it."

"Allow me," said Pod, authoritatively, taking the letter from the girl's hand. "You were quite right, Molly, to ask my advice." As Molly had said, the letter was plainly addressed to Mr. Kelvin, and it had evidently been opened. As two-thirds of the office correspondence was seen by Pod in one form or another, and as this particular letter was not marked "Private," he felt no compunction about opening it and reading it. It was Gerald Warburton's first letter, in which he asked whether it was true that Jacob Lloyd had died without a will, and that he was his uncle's heir.

Pod's mind was made up in a moment. It seemed doubtful whether his master had ever seen that letter: in any case, he should see it now. "You had better leave this in my hands, Molly," he said, still with his ducal air. "It is only an ordinary business letter, which has

been given to Miss Deane for some purpose, and which she has evidently mislaid. You may depend upon my making it all right, and there will be no need for you to say a word about it." Then he kissed Molly and told her not to forget the rose, and then he let her go.

"Another of your little tricks, Miss Deane, or else I'm vastly mistaken," said Mr. Piper to himself. "This letter has been cut open with a pair of scissors. The governor never cut open a letter with a pair of scissors in his life. Funny, very."

Pod's watch came to an end in about an hour. He was summoned into the room, and, much to his surprise, found his master dressed and sitting in his easy-chair. How gaunt and hollow-eyed he looked! What a wreck of his former self! How loose his clothes hung about him! Tears came into Pod's eyes as he looked at him. All Kelvin's sternness and arbitrary ways were forgotten in pity for the plight in which he saw him now. Dr. Whitaker, with his arms folded on the table, was regarding him attentively.

"Piper," said Mr. Kelvin, "I want you to let Dr. Whitaker out, and you must contrive it so that my mother does not see him."

"Yes, sir."

"After that, you will come and help me to crawl downstairs as far as my mother's sitting-room."

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Whitaker rose and took his hat. "Beg pardon, sir," said Pod to his master, "but here's a letter which Molly the housemaid gave me just now. She found it in Miss Deane's room while sweeping behind the dressing-table. As the letter is addressed to you, I thought I had better let you have it."

Kelvin took the letter with hands that trembled a little, and looked first of all at the direction, and then at the mode in which the letter had been opened. Dr. Whitaker came forward to shake hands. "Don't go for a minute or two," said Kelvin. "There is something else I want to say to you."

Dr. Whitaker sat down again, and Kelvin drew out the letter and glanced first of all at the signature. He started when he saw the name, and then he ran his eye quickly over the contents; last of all he read the letter through, slowly and carefully.

"This is dated nearly a month ago," he said, "and yet I have never seen it till to-day. It has been kept purposely from me. By what a web of treachery and deceit am I enmeshed! It is horrible—horrible!" He sat for a little while in silence, holding the letter in his hand, his eyes bent sadly on the floor. No one spoke.

"Whitaker," he said at last, turning abruptly on the doctor, "I want to go to Stammers."

"To Stammers! When?"

"Now—at once."

"Impossible! I would not answer for the consequences of such a mad act."

"Whatever the consequences may be, I must go, and at once. Piper, run to the King's Head, and order a brougham to be here in ten minutes from now." Pod was off like a shot.

"Kelvin, you must be crazy to do this thing."

"Perhaps so, my friend, but still I shall do it. During the last half-hour it seems as if the scales had fallen from my eyes. I seem now to see that woman as she really is—not as I have always believed her to be. I sent her to Stammars this morning with a message of the utmost importance. How will she deliver that message? Not as I asked her to deliver it, but—What a fool I must have been to send her on such an errand! I tell you, Whitaker, that I must go after her: that there is not a minute to lose."

"If you must go, you must, but in that case I shall go with you."

And in that way the matter was settled. Dr. Whitaker, finding that further opposition was useless, yielded the point, but was determined not to lose sight of Kelvin till he had seen him safely back in his own room. A quarter of an hour later the brougham came round. Kelvin managed to crawl downstairs, a step at a time, supported on each side by Whitaker and Pod. Mrs. Kelvin, being still busy with her pudding in the back part of the house, knew nothing of all this. Matthew sent her a message by Mr. Bray, his chief clerk; but it was not to be given to her till after the brougham had started.

Then Pod climbed on to the box beside the driver, and away they went.

CHAPTER XXX.

VAN DUREN IN WALES.

IN the dusk of a sweet May evening a man slipped quietly out of the back door of the Ring of Bells tavern—a low public-house frequented chiefly by fishermen and labourers, in the village of Marhyddoc, and shunning the more frequented neighbourhoods, found himself presently in a pretty winding lane that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular, and was quite given over to solitude. Here the man sat down for a while on the trunk of a fallen tree. The house had become intolerable to him: he could stay in it no longer; so he had strolled out to this quiet nook, there to wait till dusk had deepened into dark. Not without difficulty would even Jonas Pringle have recognized in this man Max Van Duren. Hands and face had been stained till they were the colour of a mulatto's, and his hair had been dyed jet black. He had only been twelve hours in Marhyddoc, but he had already found out a great deal that it behoved him to know. Fortunately for Van Duren,

the landlord of the Ring of Bells spoke very tolerable English, and was very fond of airing his accomplishment, besides being naturally of a garrulous turn of mind. As a consequence, Van Duren had very soon extracted from him all that he had to tell—more than enough to confirm his worst fears.

In the portraits which the landlord drew of two of the strangers who were staying at the big hotel on the cliff, he had no difficulty in recognizing Byrne and Miriam. He could no longer doubt that he had been duped by these two; that they had only hired his rooms, and wormed themselves into his confidence, in order to extract from him a secret which, up to that time, he could have sworn would never be whispered by him in mortal ears. And they had succeeded but too well. What a weak fool he had been! How easily that girl had twined him round her finger! How well he could see the sneer that would curve her beautiful lips when she spoke of him to her father! He hated her now with as much intensity as he had loved her before. Had Miriam Byrne come walking down that lane in the May twilight—had she and Max Van Duren met face to face with no third person by, the chances that her father would ever have seen his daughter alive again would have been very problematical indeed.

But with Byrne and his daughter at the hotel was another individual, according to the landlord's account—an elderly gentleman, whom Van Duren altogether failed to recognize. Not that he was greatly troubled thereby: he had far more important matters to occupy his thoughts.

Then the landlord had other news—news that he was in no wise loth to impart, that for Van Duren was full of intense significance. He knew all about the divers and their strange apparatus and dresses. He told his hearer how, in the first place, some one had come down to Marhyddoc, and, after some difficulty, had found out the exact spot where the schooner *Albatross* had foundered twenty years before. The place was then marked with a buoy, and soon after that the divers had come. Everybody in the village had asked themselves what there was in the cargo of the *Albatross* that could be worth the trouble and expense of recovery after having been for twenty years at the bottom of the sea: and for a long time the question asked by everybody had remained unanswered. But at last it had oozed out, nobody seemed to know exactly how, that the particular object for which the divers were instructed to search was a small oaken box, clamped with silver. The box was said by some to contain certain documents and title-deeds of immense value, for lack of which the rightful heir to a great property had been kept out of his own for years. Others knew for a fact that the box was full of sovereigns which were being sent out to America to buy slaves with. Others there were who averred that inside the silver-clamped box would be found the evidence of a terrible murder that had remained undetected all this long time.

"But of course they have not succeeded in finding the box?" Van Duren had said to the landlord, burning with a terrible anxiety to know the worst.

"But they have. Yes, indeed," said the man, with a chuckle. Van Duren, on hearing this, got up abruptly and went to the window. His face was ghastly; his mouth twitched nervously in a way that he could not control; his staring eyes saw nothing that was before them. "The divers had been down three times without success," continued the man. "They went down again very early this morning, and in less than an hour they found the box. I saw it with my own eyes when they came ashore:—a small oak box, clamped at the corners, and with two letters on the lid."

Van Duren tried to speak, but he was like a man under the influence of a nightmare. The words died away in his parched-up throat. Happily the landlord took his listener's silence as a sign that his narrative was interesting, and went on without noticing him.

"When the box was brought ashore it was given into the custody of John Williams, the policeman. Yes, indeed. John took it up to the hotel on the cliff where the gentlemen are staying, and there he waited with the box on his knee till Mr. Davies of St. Owens, who is a magistrate, came, three hours later, and then they all went into a room together, the divers and the gentlemen, and the door was locked and there the box was opened."

Van Duren would have liked to say, "And what did they find in the box when they opened it?" but not for the life of him could he have put the question. He knew quite well—no one better—what would be found in the box; but none the less did he hunger to hear every detail from the landlord's lips. However, he had only to wait and say nothing; his host's natural garrulity would do the rest.

"Whether they found title-deeds in the box, or whether they found sovereigns, or whether they found anything at all, is more than I can exactly say. John Williams, the policeman, for all he's my own cousin's nephew, and I treated him to three glasses of brandy after he came down from the hotel, only shook his head and wouldn't say a word, though he knew very well that I wouldn't have whispered it to a soul. No, indeed. But John Williams will have no more of my brandy without paying for it like any other man."

Such was the story told Max Van Duren in the little Welsh inn. His worst fears were realized. The sea had given up its secret. Everything was known. He was stunned by the blow, and seemed for the time being to have lost all power of cool thought, all possibility of looking his position steadily in the face and of deciding as to what steps it behoved him to take next.

But even through the midst of the vague, unreasoning terror that now possessed him—through the ghastly dread that now held him

as with a hand of iron, he could not help wondering by what means, through what special agencies, this unlooked-for and terrible result had been brought about. Who forged the first link of evidence tending to implicate him in a crime committed so long ago that at times it almost seemed as if no such deed had ever really been done—as if it were nothing more than a distempered dream of his own imagining? What first induced Byrne and Miriam to come to his house and worm themselves into his confidence on purpose to elicit from him the particulars of the shipwreck of the *Albatross*? How did Byrne first come to connect him, Max Van Duren, with the murder of Paul Stilling? And, which was more mysterious still, whence and how did he derive the knowledge which enabled him to connect the story of the shipwreck with that crime? Never once during all the intervening years had Van Duren troubled himself to make any inquiry after Ambrose Murray. He had never cared to ascertain whether the man he had so foully wronged were alive or dead, whether he had been pardoned and set at liberty, or whether he was still shut up in his living tomb. But now, to-day, it did occur to him to ask himself whether it was in any way possible that it was the hand of Ambrose Murray which had linked together the fatal chain of evidence—a chain that would prove strong enough to hang him unless he took particular care what he was about. But he scouted the idea almost as soon as it came to him. If Ambrose Murray were still alive, it was merely as a harmless lunatic—as a melancholy madman whom one might perhaps afford to pity, but could certainly have no cause to fear.

But it was certainly not the hand of a harmless lunatic that was at the bottom of this plot to bring his long-hidden guilt home to him. It was the hand, rather, of a man as strong, cunning, and unscrupulous as himself—a hand that, so far, had won every point of the game against him—a hand that would succeed in tying a halter firmly round his neck, unless—unless what? he asked himself, with a mixture of terror and despair. He did not know who his enemy was, where to look for him, or how best to confront him. He had got a sort of vague notion in his mind that Byrne was merely the puppet of a firmer will and a stronger hand; that his real enemy was lurking out of sight in the background, weaving round him, thread by thread, the meshes of a net from which in the end he would find it impossible to escape.

Not till dusk had fairly set in did Van Duren venture outside the inn door. He seemed to have lost his appetite entirely; but he kept up his strength, and in some small way his courage also, by repeated doses of the inn's fiery spirits. When, at last, he did leave the house, he had no settled intention in doing so. The place for hours had been full of noisy, half-drunken company; all of whom, he could not help hearing through the thin lath-and-plaster wall that divided his room from the tap-room, were loudly discussing some important topic in their native

Welsh. That topic, as the landlord took care to inform him more than once, was neither more nor less than the finding of the long-sought-for box by the divers. At last he felt that he must either leave the house or go mad. So he wandered out into a quiet lane at the back of the village, and there sat down on the trunk of a felled tree.

What should he do? What ought his next step to be? His mind was all in a maze of doubt and terror and perplexity. Should he hurry off to London by the first train, secure all his available property, shut up his house in Spur Alley, and drop quietly out of sight where no possible search for him could be made? Or should he stay and brave out everything?

Presently he began to feel very lonely among the dim shadows of the silent lane. He fancied that he heard voices whispering, and the faint rustle of garments, as if some one were watching him stealthily through the foliage at his back. He looked round with a shudder, and then he rose and walked swiftly forward. In a little while the lane took him to a rising ground that overlooked the village and the sea. On his right, and no great distance away, rose the cliff on the summit of which was built the hotel where Byrne and Miriam were staying. Several of the windows were lighted up. Which were the windows of Miriam's room, he wondered? In the midst of all his doubt and fears for his own safety, he could not help thinking about the girl who had played such a short but important part in the strange dream of his life. He had no bitterer thought even at this bitter hour than the knowledge that this girl, whom he had learnt to love so passionately, had not only never cared for him, but had duped him from the very first; that all her smiles and looks and words had been utterly false; that it was her hand, and hers alone, that had struck him down; that but for her, no harm could have happened to him; that but for her, the silver-clamped box, with its damning evidence, would have rested till doomsday at the bottom of the sea.

Without knowing or caring whither it might lead him, he had unconsciously taken a footpath which brought him presently to a little side wicket that opened into the grounds of the hotel. From the wicket a winding path led upward through thick clumps of evergreens and brushwood to the house. There was for him, in his present mood, a sort of fascination, a grim satisfaction, in the thought of being so near these cunning enemies of his, who seemed so thoroughly bent on hunting him down, while all the time they believed him to be hundreds of miles away. He had little or no sense of present fear upon him. His dread lay in the unknown future. The next blow that would be struck at him would not be struck at him here, but in London. So long as these people stayed in Wales, he was safe. They had done their worst for a little time to come.

He passed through the wicket, but as soon as he found himself in

the grounds of the hotel, he diverged from the pathway on to the grass where his footsteps were inaudible, and where the evergreens would shelter him from the view of any passer-by. But perfect quiet reigned around: not a sign of life was anywhere visible. No portion of the hotel could be seen from where he was now, but he knew in which direction it lay; and without knowing or caring to think why he did so, he kept pressing slowly forward and upward, till at length he emerged from the shrubbery into a more open part of the grounds, and there in the starlight he could see the big white building straight before him.

On one side, the hotel was built close up to the edge of the cliff, which here sloped down to the beach, and the base of which was washed by every tide. Huge boulders and jagged pieces of rock protruded here and there from the face of the cliff; but these rugged features were softened and harmonised by the numerous tufts of broom and dwarf brushwood that grew among and around them, and by the soft, green mosses and many-coloured lichens that nestled between them, and crept lovingly over them, and made them beautiful with a beauty that was other than their own. Up the face of this cliff a goat or a chamois might probably have climbed by leaping from rock to rock, or from one clump of brushwood to another; but no human foot had ever been known to venture up or down it.

It was now dark, and these more minute features of the scene were invisible to Max Van Duren. All that he could discern was, that the hotel was built close to the edge of the cliff, at the bottom of which cliff the tide was now washing heavily in with the noise of low thunder.

Having satisfied himself that there was no one about, Van Duren left the shelter of the shrubbery through which he had hitherto crept, and swiftly crossing the intervening open space, he sought the shelter of another fringe of shrubbery which grew between the gradually rising edge of the cliff and the carriage-drive that led up to the main entrance of the hotel. Keeping well within the shade of the evergreens, and climbing higher step by step, a few minutes more brought him close up to one corner of the house. It was now requisite to move with extreme caution. Suddenly he heard the sound of voices, and two or three loud good-nights. Some one was evidently leaving the hotel, and would pass close by him in a few moments. It would never do to be found there; so he plunged deeper into the shrubbery, and presently found himself close to one of the lighted windows that he had seen from the valley below. He hardly knew whether to advance or retire. The question was, Who were the occupants of the room? If strangers only, he would go quietly back by the way he had come; but if there was a chance of seeing Miriam—well, to see her again, he was prepared to risk much. He hated her, or fancied that he did, and yet there was still a strange fascination for him in the thought that he was close to her, that he was only separated from her by the thickness of a wall.

Had he met her there alone in the shrubbery, he would have strangled her, but after that he would have kissed her and wept over her, and would probably have ended all by jumping over the cliff.

He crept close up to the window and peered through the venetians. Fortunately for his purpose, they were not very closely drawn, and he could see into the room without difficulty. It was a large room, and was lighted by another window opposite to that through which Van Duren was now looking. This second window—a French one, by the way—was wide open, for the evening was somewhat sultry. Beyond it was a small balcony, and then the cliff, and, a hundred feet below, the white-tipped waves. Round a table in the middle of the room, four gentlemen were seated in earnest conversation. Three of them Van Duren had never seen before, but in the fourth he had no difficulty in recognizing his quondam lodger, Mr. Peter Byrne. It is true that the white locks, the hump, and the general air of feebleness and decrepitude, had all disappeared; but Byrne's strongly-marked features could not be mistaken for those of any other man. But hardly had Van Duren time to notice all this, before his eyes were drawn to and concentrated on an object that was standing on the middle of the table. He shuddered from head to foot, and turned suddenly sick as he looked. He had recognized the object in a moment. It was the silver-clamped box which the divers had brought up from the bottom of the sea: it was the box for the sake of which Paul Stilling had been stabbed in his sleep.

Was the box full or empty? The lid was open, but Van Duren could not see inside. Anyhow, there was the box. What a host of terrible memories the sight of it called up in his mind! Trifling circumstances, half-forgotten, and that he had thrust persistently from his memory years ago, came back now with the vivid clearness of a photograph. Stilling's drunken laugh, the peculiar nervous twitching of his left eye, the broken nail on one of his fingers, the very patch on one of his boots, quizzically commented on by him as he was pulling on his slippers in front of the fire—how they all came back to Van Duren! As he stood there, it seemed to him but a few yesterdays, instead of twenty long years, since —

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, and shut out the sight for a moment. When he looked again, Miriam was there. She was bending over the back of her father's chair and saying something in his ear. She had never looked sweeter, in Van Duren's eyes, than she looked to-night, with her soft flowing grenadine dress, and her bows of ribbon here and there, and a tea-rose in her hair.

He would have given all he had in the world, everything save life itself, to have called this girl his own and have won one smile of real love from her beautiful lips. Presently she lifted up a face that was radiant with smiles, then she pinched her father's ear playfully, and

turned and left the room. And that was the last time that Max Van Duren ever set eyes on Miriam Byrne.

A few minutes later, the four gentlemen rose and left the room. They left the box behind them, still standing wide open in the middle of the table. From this Van Duren at once concluded that it must have been emptied of its contents. Had it not, they would hardly have left it there unguarded. Then all at once the thought struck Van Duren that if he could only obtain possession of the box, if he could only steal it away unknown to anyone, then would his enemies be deprived of the strongest link in their evidence against him—perhaps the only link of any value in a court of justice. The box could undoubtedly be sworn to as being that which had at one time belonged to Paul Stilling; but could the contents of the box, after twenty years' immersion in the sea, be sworn to with equal certainty? To him that seemed very doubtful indeed. In any case, the chain of evidence against him would certainly be weakened in a material degree should the box not be producible by the prosecution. It would be worth risking much to obtain it. There it was, within a few yards of him, in an empty room: why should he not take possession of it again, as he had done once before, long years ago? Not a sound could anywhere be heard save the low thunder of the incoming tide. But how was it possible for him to get into the room, unseen and unheard? He tried the sash of the window against which he was standing. Fortunately for his purpose, it proved to be unfastened. All that he had to do was to push up the sash sufficiently high, climb over the low window-sill, thrust aside the venetians, and there he would be—the box within reach of his hand. Five minutes would suffice for everything. If only he could make sure that no one would enter the room for five short minutes! But of that he could by no means make sure: he must run the risk of it. But even while these thoughts were in his mind, his hands had been busy with the window, and almost before he knew what had happened, he found that he had pushed up the sash high enough to admit of his ingress to the room.

A minute later, and his hand was on the box. Even at such a moment as that it thrilled him strangely to touch it. He glanced into it: it was empty, as he had felt sure that it would be. Then he shut down the lid, and taking up the box, he placed it under his arm and turned to go. But at this instant the door was quickly opened, and some one came into the room. Van Duren turned instinctively, and as his eyes met those of the man who had entered, he gave utterance to a low cry of terror and surprise.

There before him stood the man whom he had so terribly wronged—whom he had consigned without remorse to a living tomb—who would have become the hangman's prey had not his brain been too weak to bear the burden of his doom. This man, then, it was,

who he had fondly believed in his heart must have died long ago—this man it was, who, like a sleuth-hound, was now on his track, determined to hunt him down without mercy and without ruth. Ambrose Murray was now but a wreck of his former self, but Max Van Duren knew him again the moment his eyes fell on him.

Murray, in his turn, did not fail to recognise Van Duren. "Wretch! what do you here?" he exclaimed, as he advanced into the room. His right hand was buried in the breast of his frock-coat—an habitual action with him; but Van Duren took it at once that his fingers were grasping some hidden weapon, and as Murray advanced he fell back step by step.

He did not answer Murray's question. He seemed, indeed, as though he had not heard it. His face was ashy pale. Surprise, and terror, and anger seemed to glare out of his eyes in turn; but still he did not speak.

On first entering the room, Murray had not missed the box; but now his eyes travelled from Van Duren to the table, and then back again, and he understood everything.

"Villain! bloodthirsty villain!" he cried. "Would you steal that box a second time?" and with that he took two or three rapid strides towards Van Duren.

But the other, still without answering, and still facing his enemy, fell quickly back. Murray was now between him and the window by which he had entered; but he seemed to remember that there was another window behind him, and it was towards this that he was now making his way. He still evidently suspected that Murray's hand held a pistol, and that he might be fired at, any moment.

The latter continued to advance. "Max Jacoby, I have you at last, and this time you shall not escape me!" he exclaimed, and therewith he strode swiftly to the bell-rope and pulled it violently.

But at the first sound of the bell, Van Duren turned quickly and made for the open French window. Before Murray had time to utter a single word of warning, he was on the balcony. Next moment his hand grasped the railing, and with a loud, mocking laugh he vaulted over and disappeared in the black darkness below. He had either not known, or had forgotten, that the balcony was built immediately over the edge of the cliff.

A few moments later, Peter Byrne and two or three others hurried into the room in response to the bell's imperative summons. Ambrose Murray was lying senseless on the floor, and the silver-clamped box was no longer there.

(To be continued.)

CHANDLER AND CHANDLER.

JACOB CHANDLER, solicitor, conveyancer, and land-agent, had died: and his son Valentine (possibly taking a leaf out of the history of Jonas Chuzzlewit) determined that he should at least be borne to the grave with honours, if he had never had an opportunity to specially bear them in life. Crabb churchyard was a show of mutes and plumes, and Crabb highway was blocked up with black coaches. As it is considered a compliment down with us to get an invitation to a funeral, and a great slight on the dead to refuse it, all classes, from Sir John Whitney, down to Massock, the brickmaker, and little Farmer Bean, responded to Valentine Chandler's notes. Some people said that it was Valentine's mother, the new widow, who wished for so much display; and probably they were right.

It took place on a Saturday. I can see the blue sky overhead now, and the bright sun that shone upon the scene and lighted up the feathers. It was thought he must have died rich, and that the three daughters he left would have good portions. His son Valentine had the practice: so, at any rate, *he* was provided for. Tom Chandler, the nephew, made one of the mourners: and the spectators talked freely enough in an undertone, as he passed them in his place when the procession walked up the churchyard path. It seemed but the other day, they said, that his poor father was buried, killed by that lamentable accident. Time flew. Years passed imperceptibly. But Jacob—lying so still under that black and white pall, now slowly disappearing within the church—had not done the right thing by his dead brother's son. The practice had been made by Thomas, the elder brother. Thomas took Jacob into full partnership without fee or recompense; and there was an understanding entered into between them later (but no legal agreement) that if the life of either failed his son should succeed to his post. If Thomas, the elder, died, his son Tom was to take his father's place as senior partner in due time. Thomas did die; died suddenly; but from that hour to this, Jacob had never attempted to carry out the agreement: he had taken his own son, Valentine, into partnership, but not Tom. And Crabb knew, both North and South, for such things get about curiously, that the injustice had troubled Jacob when he was dying, and that he had charged Valentine to remedy it.

Sunday morning was not so fine: leaden clouds, threatening rain, had overshadowed the summer sky. But all the family mourners came to

church, Valentine wearing his long crape hat-band and shoulder scarf (for that was our custom); the widow in her costly mourning, and the three girls in theirs. The mourning was furnished, Miss Timmens took the opportunity of whispering to Mrs. Todhetley, from a fashionable black shop at Worcester: and, to judge by the frillings and furbelows, very fashionable indeed the shop must have been. Mrs. Chandler and her son Tom sat together in their own pew, Mrs. Cramp, Jacob's sister, with them. It chanced that we were staying at Crabb Cot at the time of Jacob's death, just as we had been at Thomas's, and so saw the doings and heard the sayings, and the Squire was at hand for both funerals.

The next morning, Monday, Valentine Chandler took his place in the office as master for the first time, and seated himself in his late father's chair in the private room. He and his mother had already held some conversation as to arrangements for the future. Valentine said he should live at the office at Islip: now that there was only himself he should have more to do, and did not want the bother of walking or driving to and fro morning and evening. She would live entirely at North Villa.

Valentine took his place in his father's room; and the clerks, who had been hail-fellow-well-met with him hitherto, put on respect of manner, and called him Mr. Chandler. Tom had an errand to do every Monday morning connected with the business, and did not enter until nearly eleven o'clock. Before settling to his desk, he went in to Valentine.

They shook hands. In times of bereavement we are apt to observe more ceremony than at others. Tom sat down: which caused the new master to look towards him inquiringly.

"Valentine, I want to have a bit of talk with you. Upon what footing am I to be on here?"

"How do you mean?" asked Valentine: who was leaning back in the green leather chair with the air of his new importance full upon him, his elbows on the low arms, and an ivory paper-knife held between his fingers.

"My Uncle Jacob told me that from henceforth I was to assume my right place here, Valentine. I suppose it will be so."

"What do you call your right place?" cried Valentine.

"Well, my right place would be head of the office," replied Tom, speaking, as he always did, cordially and pleasantly. "But I don't wish to be exacting. Make me your partner, Valentine, and give me the second place in the firm."

"Can't do it, old fellow," said Valentine, in a tone which seemed to say he would like to joke the matter off. "The practice was my father's, and it is now mine."

"But you know that part of it ought to have been mine from the

first, Valentine. That is, from the time I have been of an age to succeed to it."

"I don't know it, I'm sure, Tom. If it 'ought' to have been yours, I suppose my father would have given it to you. He was able to judge."

Tom dropped his voice. "He sent for me that last day of his life, you know, Valentine. It was to tell me he had not done the right thing by me, but that it should be done now: that he had charged *you* to do it."

"Ah," said Valentine, carelessly, "worn-out old men take up odd fancies—fit for a lunatic asylum. My poor father must have been spent with disease, though not with age: but we did not know it."

"Will you make me your partner?"

"No, Tom, I can't. The practice was all my father's, and the practice must be mine. Look here: on that same day you speak of he sent for John Paul to add a codicil to his will. Now it stands to reason that if he had wished me to take you into the firm, he would have mentioned it in that codicil and bound me down to do it."

"And he did not?"

"Not a word of it. You are quite welcome to read the will. It is a very short and simple one: leaving what property he had to my mother, and the business and office furniture to me. The codicil Paul wrote was to decree that I should pay my mother a certain sum out of the profits. Your name is not mentioned in the will at all, from beginning to end."

Tom made no reply. Valentine continued.

"The object of his tying me down to pay over to my mother a portion of the profits is, because she has not enough to live on without it. There need be no secret about it. I am to give her a third of the income I make, whatsoever it may be."

"One final word, Valentine: will you be just and take me in?"

"No, Tom, I cannot.—And there's another thing. I don't wish to be mean, I'm sure; it's not in my nature: but with all my own expenses upon me and this third that I must hand over to my people, I fear I shall not be able to continue to give your mother the hundred and fifty a year that my father has allowed her so long."

"You cannot help yourself, Valentine. That much is provided for in the original partnership deed, and you are bound by it."

"No," dissented Valentine, flicking a speck off the front of his black coat. "My father might have been bound by it, but I am not. Now that the two original partners are dead, the deed is cancelled, don't you see. It is not binding upon me."

"I think you are mistaken: but I will leave that question for this morning. Is your decision, not to give me a share, final?"

"It is."

"Let me make one remark. You say the codicil stipulates that you shall pay a third of the profits to your mother—and it is a very just and right thing to do. Valentine, rely upon it, that your father's last intentions were that, of the other two-thirds left, one of them should be mine."

Valentine flushed red. He had a florid complexion at all times, something like salmon colour. Very different from Tom's, which was clear and healthy.

"We won't talk any more about it, Tom. How you can get such crotchets into your head, I can't imagine. If you sit there till mid-day, I can say no more than I have said: I cannot take you into partnership."

"Then I shall leave you," said Tom, rising. He was a fine-looking young fellow, standing there with his arm on the back of the client's chair, in which he had sat; tall and straight. His good, honest face had a shade of pain in it, as it gazed straight out to Valentine's. He looked his full six-and-twenty years.

"Well, I wish you would leave me, Tom," replied Valentine, carelessly. "I have heaps to do this morning."

"Leave the office, I mean. Leave you for good."

"Nonsense!"

"Though your father did not give me the rights that were my just due, I remained on, expecting and hoping that he would give them sometime. It was my duty to remain with him; at least, my mother told me so; and perhaps my interest. But the case is changed now. I will not stay with you, Valentine, unless you do me justice; I shall leave you now. Now, this hour."

"But you can't Tom. You would put me to frightful inconvenience."

"And what inconvenience—inconvenience for life—are you putting me to, Valentine? You take my prospects from me. The position that ought to be mine, here at Islip, you refuse to let me hold. This was my father's practice; a portion of it, at least, ought to be mine. I will not continue to be a servant where I ought to be a master."

"Then you must go," said Valentine.

Tom held out his hand. "Good-bye. I do not part in enmity."

"Good-bye, Tom. I'm sorry: but it's your fault."

Tom Chandler went into the office where he had used to sit, opened his desk, and began putting up what things belonged to him. They made a tolerable-sized parcel. Valentine, left in his chair of state, sat on in a brown study. All the inconvenience that Tom's leaving him would be productive of was flashing into his mind. Tom had been, under old Jacob, the prop and stay of the business; knew about everything, and had a clear head for details. He himself was different—and Valentine was never more sure of the fact than at this moment. There are lawyers and lawyers. Tom was one, Valentine was another.

He, Valentine, had never much cared for business; he liked pleasure a great deal better. Indulged always by both father and mother, he had grown up self-indulgent. It was all very fine to perch himself in that chair and play the master; but he knew that, without Tom to direct things, for some time to come he should be three-parts lost. But, as to making him a partner and giving him a share?—"No," concluded Valentine emphatically, "I won't do it."

Tom, carrying his paper parcel, left the house and crossed the road to the post-office, which was higher up the street, to post a letter he had hastily written. It was addressed to a lawyer at Worcester. A week or two before, Tom, being at Worcester, was asked by this gentleman if he would take the place of head clerk and manager in his office. The question was put jokingly, for the lawyer supposed Tom to be a fixture at Islip: but Tom saw that he would have been glad for him to take the berth. He hoped it might still be vacant. What with one thing and another, beginning with the injustice done him at the old place and his anxiety to get into another without delay, Tom felt more bothered than he had ever felt in his life. The tempting notion of setting-up somewhere for himself came into his mind. But it went out of it again: he could not afford to risk any waste of time, with his mother's home to keep up, and especially with this intimated threat of Valentine's to stop her hundred and fifty pounds a year income.

"How do you do, Mr. Chandler?"

At the sound of the pretty voice, Tom turned short round from the post-office window, which was a stationer's, to see a charming girl all ribbons and muslins, with shy blue eyes and bright hair. Tom took the hand only half held out to him.

"I beg your pardon, Emma: I was reading this concert bill. The idea of Islip's getting up a concert!"

She was the only child of John Paul the lawyer, and had as fair a face as you'd wish to see, and a habit of blushing at nothing. To watch her as she stood there, the roses coming and going, and the dimples deepening, and the small white teeth peeping, did Tom good. He was reddening himself, for that matter.

"Yes, it is to be given in the large club-room at the Bell to-night," she answered. "Shall you come over for it?"

"Are you going to it, Emma?"

"Oh yes. Papa has taken twelve tickets. A great many people are coming in to go with us."

"I shall go also," said Tom decidedly. And at that the roses came again.

"What a large parcel you are carrying!"

Tom held the brown paper parcel further out at the remark.

"They are my goods and chattels," said he. "Things that I had at the office. I have left it, Emma."

"Left the office!" she repeated, looking as though she did not understand. "You don't mean *really* left it?—left it for good?"

"I have left it for good, Emma. Valentine ——"

"Here's papa," interrupted Emma, as a stout, elderly gentleman with iron-grey hair turned out of the stationer's; neither of them having the least idea he was there.

"Is it you, Tom Chandler?" cried Mr. Paul.

"Yes, it is, sir."

"And fine to be you, I should say! Spending your time in gossip at the busiest part of the day."

"Unfortunately I have to-day no business to do," returned Tom, smiling in the old lawyer's face. "And I was just telling Miss Paul why. I have left the office, sir, and am looking out for another situation."

Mr. Paul stared at him. "Why, it is your own office. What's that for?"

"It ought to be my own office in part, as it was my father's before me. But Valentine cannot see that, sir. He tells me he will not take me into partnership; that I ought not to expect it. I refuse to remain on any other terms; and so I have left him for good. These are my rattletraps. Odds and ends of things that I am bringing away."

Mr. Paul continued to look at Tom in silence for a minute or two. Tom thought he was considering what he should next say. It was not that, however. "How well he would suit me! How I should like to take him! What a load of work he'd lift off my shoulders!" Those were the thoughts that were running rapidly through Mr. Paul's mind.

But he did not speak them. In fact, he had no intention of speaking them, or of taking on Tom, much as he would have liked to do it.

"When Jacob Chandler lay dying but yesterday, as it were, he told me you would join his son; that the two of you would carry on the practice together."

"Yes, he said the same thing to me," replied Tom. "But Valentine refuses to carry it out. So I told him I would not be a servant where I ought to be a master, and came away."

"And what are you going to do, young man?"

Tom smiled. He was just as much a lawyer as Mr. Paul was. "I should like to set up in practice for myself," he answered; "but I do not yet see my way sufficiently clear to do so. There may be a chance for me at Worcester, as managing clerk. I have written to ask if the place is filled up. May I join your party to the concert to-night, sir?" he asked.

"I don't mind—if you are going to it," said the old lawyer: "but I can't see what young men want at concerts?"

Tom caught Miss Emma's eye and her blushes, and gave her a glance that told he should be sure to come.

But, before the lapse of twenty-four hours, in spite of his non-inten-

tion, Mr. Paul had taken on Tom Chandler: and, looking back in later years, it might be seen that it had been on the cards of destiny that Tom should be taken.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we will."

Lawyer Paul was still in his dining-room that evening in his handsome house just out of Islip, and before any of his expected guests had come, when Tom arrived to say he could not make one, and was shown into the drawing-room. Feasting his eyes with Miss Emma's charming dress, and shaking her hand longer than was at all polite, Tom told her why he could not go.

"My mother took me to task severely, Emma. She asked me what I could be thinking of to wish to go to a public concert when my uncle was only buried the day before yesterday. The truth is, I never thought of that."

"I am so sorry," whispered Emma. "But I am worse than you are. It was I who first asked whether you meant to go. And it is to be the nicest concert!"

"I don't care for the concert," avowed Tom. "I—I should like to have gone to it, though."

"At least you—you will stay and take some tea," suggested Emma.

"If I may."

"Would you please to loose my hand?" went on Emma. "The lace has caught in your sleeve button."

"I'll undo it," said Tom. "What pretty lace it is! Is it Valenciennes? My mother thinks there's no lace like Valenciennes."

"It is only pillow," replied Emma, bending her face over the lace and the buttons. "After you left this morning, papa said he wished he had remembered to ask you where he could get a prospectus of those water-works. He——"

"Mrs. and Miss Maceveril," interrupted a servant, opening the door to show in some ladies.

So the interview was over; and Tom took the opportunity to go to the lawyer's dining-room, and tell him about the water-works.

"You have come over from Crabb to go to this fine concert!" cried Mr. Paul, sipping his port wine; which he always took out of a claret-glass. Though never more than one glass, he would be half an hour over it.

"I have come to say I can't go to it," replied Tom. "My mother thinks it would not be seemly so soon after Uncle Jacob's death."

"Quite right of her, too. Why don't you sit down? No wine? Well, sit down all the same. I want to talk to you. Will you come into my office?"

The proposal was so sudden, so unexpected, that Tom scarcely

knew what to make of it. He did not know that Mr. Paul's office wanted him.

"I have been thinking upon matters since I saw you this morning, Tom Chandler. I am growing elderly; some people would say old; and the thought has often crossed me that it might be as well if I had somebody about me different from an ordinary clerk. Were I laid aside by illness to-morrow the conduct of the business would still lie upon me; and lie it must, unless I get a confidential manager, who is a qualified lawyer: one who can act in my place without reference to me. I offer you the post; and I will give you, to begin with, two hundred a year."

"I should like it of all things," cried Tom in delight, his eyes and face sparkling. "I am used to Islip and don't care to leave it. Yes, sir, I will come with the greatest pleasure."

"Then that's settled," said old Paul.

II.

JUST about two years had gone on, and it was hot summer again. In the same room at North Villa where poor Thomas Chandler had died, sat Valentine Chandler and his mother. It was evening, and the window was open to the garden. In another room, its window also open, sat the three girls, Georgiana, Clementina, and Julietta; all of them singing and playing and squalling.

"Not talk about business on a Sunday night!—You must have grown wonderfully serious all on a sudden!" exclaimed Mrs. Chandler, tartly. "I never get to see you except on a Sunday: you know that, Valentine."

"It is not often I can get time to come over on a week-day," responded Valentine, helping himself to some spirits and water, which had been placed on the table after supper. "Business won't let me."

"If all I hear be true, it is not business that hinders you," said Mrs. Chandler. "Be quiet, Valentine: I *must* speak. I have put it off and off, disliking to do it; but I must speak at last. Your business, as I am told, is falling off alarmingly; that a great deal of it has gone over to John Paul."

"Who told you?"

"That is beyond the question, Valentine, and I am not going to make mischief. Is it true, or is it not?"

"A little of the practice went over to Paul when Tom left me. It was not much. Some of the clients, you see, had been accustomed to Tom at our place, and they followed him. That was a crafty move of John Paul's—the getting hold of Tom."

"I am not alluding to the odds and ends of practice that left you

then, Valentine. I speak chiefly of this last year. Hardly a week has passed in it but some client or other has left you for Paul."

"If they have, I can't help it," was the careless reply. "How those girls squall!"

"I suppose there is no underhand influence at work, Valentine?" she said dubiously. "Tom Chandler does not hold out baits for your clients, and so fish them away from you?"

"Well, no, I suppose not," repeated the young lawyer, draining his glass. "I accused Tom of it one day, and for once in his life he flew into a passion, asking me what I had ever seen in him to suspect he could be guilty of such a thing."

"No. I fear it is as I have been given to understand, Valentine: that the cause lies with you. You spend your time in pleasure instead of being at business. When clients go to the office, three times out of every five they do not find you. You are not there. You are over at the Bell, playing at billiards, or drinking in the bar."

"What an unfounded calumny!" exclaimed Valentine.

"I have been told," continued Mrs. Chandler, sinking her voice, "that you are getting to drink frightfully. It is nothing for clients now to find you in a state incapable of attending to them."

"Now, mother, I insist upon knowing who told you these lies," spluttered Valentine, getting up and striding to the window. "Let anybody come forward and prove that he has found me incapable—if he can."

"I heard that Sir John Whitney went in the other day and could make neither top nor tail of what you said," continued his mother, disregarding his denial. "You are agent for the little bit of property he owns here: he chanced to come over from Whitney Hall, and found you like that."

"I'll write to Sir John Whitney and ask what he means by saying it."

"He did not say it—that I know of. Others were witnesses of your state as well as he."

"If my clerks tell tales out of my office, I'll discharge them from it," burst forth Valentine, too angry to notice the tacit admission his words gave. "Not the clerks, you say? Then why don't you——"

"Do be still, Valentine. Putting yourself out like this will do no good. I hope it is not true: if you assure me it is not, I am ready to believe you. All I spoke for was, to caution you, and to tell you what is being said, that you may be on your guard. Leave off going to the Bell; stick to business instead: people will soon cease talking then."

"I daresay they will!" growled Valentine.

"If you are always at your post, ready to confer with clients, they would have no plea for leaving you and going to Paul. For all our sakes, Valentine, you must do this."

"And so I do. If——"

"Hush! The girls are coming in. I hear them shutting the piano."

Valentine dashed out a second supply, and drank it, not caring whether it contained most brandy or water. We are never so angry as when conscience accuses us: and it was accusing him.

In came the young ladies, laughing, romping, and pushing one another; Georgiana, Clementina, and Julietta, arrayed in all the colours of the rainbow. The chief difference Sunday made to them was, that their smartest clothes came out.

Mrs. Chandler's accusations were right, and Valentine's denials wrong. During the past two years he had been drifting downwards. The Bell was getting to possess so great a fascination for him that he could not keep away from it more than a couple of hours together. It was nothing for him to be seen playing billiards in the morning, or lounging in the parlour or the bar-room, drinking. One of his clerks would come interrupting him with news that some client was waiting at the office, and Valentine would put down his cue or his glass, and go flying over. But clients, as a rule, don't like this kind of reception: they expect to find their legal advisers cool and ready on the spot.

The worst of all was the drink. Valentine had made a friend of it so long now, that he did not attempt to do without it. Thought he could not. Where he at first drank one glass he went on to drink two glasses, and the two gave place to three, or to more. Of course it told upon him. It told now and then upon his manner in the day-time: which was unfortunate. He could leave his billiards behind him and his glass, but he could not leave the effects of what the glass had contained; and it was no uncommon thing now for his clients, when he did go rushing in to them, to find his speech uncertain and his brains in a muddle. As a natural result, the practice was passing over to John Paul as fast as it could pass: and Tom, who was chief manager at Paul's now, had been obliged to take on an extra clerk. Every day of his life old Paul told himself how lucky his move of engaging Tom had turned out. And this, not for the extra business he had gained: a great deal of that might have come to him whether Tom was with him or not: but because Tom had eased his shoulders of their hard work and care, and because he, the old man, had grown to like him so much.

But never a word had Mr. Paul said about raising Tom's salary. Tom supposed he did not intend to raise it. And, much as he liked his post, and, for many reasons, his stay at Islip, he entertained notions of quitting both. Valentine had stopped the income his father had paid to Mrs. Chandler; and Tom's two hundred a year, combined with the trifle remaining to her out of her private income, did but just suffice to keep the home going.

It chanced that on the very same Sunday evening, when they were talking at North Villa of Valentine's doings, Tom broached the subject to his mother. They were sitting out of doors in the warm summer twilight, sniffing the haycocks in the neighbouring field. Tom spoke abruptly.

"Should you mind my going to London, mother?"

"To London!" cried Mrs. Chandler. "What for?"

"To live."

"You—you are not leaving Mr. Paul, are you?"

"I am thinking of it. You see, mother mine, there is no prospect of advancement where I am. It seems to me that I may jog on for ever at two hundred a year ——"

"It is enough for us, Tom."

"As things are, yes: but nothing more. If—for instance—if I wanted to set up a home of my own, I have no means of doing it. Never shall have, at the present rate."

Mrs. Chandler turned and looked at Tom's face. "Are you thinking of marrying, Tom?"

"No. It is of no use to think of it. If I thought of it ever so, I could not do it. Putting that idea aside, it occurs to me sometimes to remember that I am eight-and-twenty, and ought to be doing better for myself."

"Do you fancy you could do better in London?"

"I am sure I could. Very much better."

Opening the Bible on her lap, Mrs. Chandler took out the spectacles that lay between the leaves, and put them into their case with trembling fingers..

"Do whatever you think best, Tom," she said at length, having waited to steady her voice. "Children leave their parents' home for one of their own; this Book tells us that they should do so. Had Jacob Chandler done the right thing by you, you would never have needed to leave Islip: had his son done the right thing by me, I should not be the burden to you that I am. But now that George has taken to send me money over from Canada ——"

"Burden!" interrupted Tom, laughingly. "Don't you talk treason, Mrs. Chandler. If I do go to London, you will have to come with me, and see the lions."

That night, lying awake, Tom made his mind up. He had been offered a good appointment in London to manage a branch office for a large legal firm—four hundred a year salary. And he would never for a moment have hesitated to take it, but for not liking to leave old Paul and (especially) old Paul's daughter.

Walking to Islip the next morning, he thought a bit about the best way of breaking it to Mr. Paul—who would be sure to come down upon him with a storm. By mid-day he had found no opportunity of

speaking: people were perpetually coming in: and in the afternoon Tom had to go a mile or two into the country. In returning he overtook Emma. She was walking along the field path under the hedge, her hat hanging on her arm by its strings.

"It is so warm," said she, in apology, as Tom shook hands. "And the trees make it shady here. I went over to ask Mary Maceveril to come back with me and dine: but they are gone to Worcester for the day."

"So much the better for me," said Tom. "I want to tell you, Emma, that I am going to leave."

"To leave!"

"I have had a very good place offered me in London. Mr. Paul knows nothing about it yet, for I did not make up my mind till last night, and I could not get a minute alone with him this morning."

She had turned her face suddenly to the hedge, seemingly to pick a wild rose. Tom saw that the pink roses on her cheek had turned to white ones.

"I shall be very sorry to leave Islip, Emma. But what else can I do? Situated as I am now, I cannot even glance at any plans for the future. By making this change, I may be able to do so. My salary will be a good one and enable me to put by: and the firm I am going to dropped me a hint of a possible partnership."

"I wish these dog-roses had no thorns! And I wish they would grow double, as the garden roses do!"

"So that I—having considered the matter thoroughly—believe I shall do well to make the change. Perhaps then I may begin to indulge dreams of a future."

"There! all the petals are off!"

"Let me gather them for you.—What is the matter, Emma?"

"Matter? Nothing, sir. What should there be?"

"Here is a beauty. Will you take it?"

"Thank you. I never thought you would leave papa, Mr. Chandler."

"But—don't you perceive my reasons, Emma? What prospect is there for me as long as I remain here? What hope can I indulge, or even glance at, of—of settling in life?"

"I daresay you don't want to settle."

"I do not put the question to myself, because it is so useless."

"I shall be late for dinner. Good-bye."

She took a sudden flight to the little white side-gate of her house, which opened to the field, ran across the garden, and disappeared within doors. Tom, catching a glimpse of her face, saw that it was wet with tears.

"Yes, it's very hard upon her and upon me," he said to himself. "And all the more so that I cannot in honour speak, even just to let her know that I care for her."

Continuing his way towards the office, he met Mr. Paul, who was just leaving it. Tom turned with him, having to report to him of the business he had been to execute.

"I expected you home before this, Chandler."

"Willis was out when I got there, and I had to wait for him. His wife gave me some syllabub."

"Now for goodness' sake don't mix up syllabubs with law!" cried the old gentleman, testily. "That's just you, Tom Chandler. Will Willis do as I advise him, or will he not?"

"Yes, he is willing; but upon conditions. I will explain to-morrow morning," added Tom, as Mr. Paul laid his hand upon the handle of his front gate, to enter.

"You can come in and explain now: and take some dinner with me."

Emma did not know he was there until she came into the dining-room. It gave her a kind of pleasant shock. They were deep in conversation about Willis, and she sat down quietly.

"I am glad he has asked me," thought Tom. "It will give me an opportunity of telling him about myself after dinner."

Accordingly, when the port wine was on the table and Emma had gone, for she never stayed after the cloth was removed, Tom spoke. Old Paul was pouring out his one large glass. The communication was over in a few words, for Tom did not feel it a comfortable one to make.

"Oh!" said old Paul, after listening. "Want to better yourself, do you? Going to London to get four hundred a year, with a faint prospect of a partnership? Have had it in your mind some time to make a change? No prospects here at Islip? Can but just keep your mother? Perhaps you want to keep a wife as well, Tom Chandler?"

Tom flushed like a school-girl. As the old gentleman saw, peering at him from under his bushy grey eyebrows.

"I should very much like to be able to do it, sir," boldly replied Tom, playing with his wine-glass. "But I can't. I can't as much as think of it under present circumstances."

"Who is the young lady? Your cousin Julietta?"

Tom burst into laughter. "No, that it is not, sir."

"Perhaps it is Miss Maceveril? Well, the Maceverils are exclusive people. But faint heart, you know, never won fair lady."

Tom shook his head. "I should not be afraid of winning *her*." But it was not Miss Maceveril he was thinking of.

"What should you be afraid of?"

"Her friends. They would not listen to me."

"Thinking you are not rich, I suppose?"

"Knowing I am not, sir."

"The young lady may have money."

"There's the evil of it," said Tom, impulsively. "If she had none,

it would be all straight and smooth for us. I would very soon make a little home for her in London."

"It is the first time I ever heard of money being an impediment to matrimony," observed old Paul, taking the first sip at his wine.

"Not when the money is on the wrong side, sir."

"Has she much?"

"I don't know in the least. She will be sure to have some: she is an only child."

"Then it *is* Mary Maceveril!" nodded the old man. "You look after her, Tom, my boy. She will have ten thousand pounds."

"Miss Maceveril would not look at me, if I wanted her ever so. She is as proud as a peacock."

"Tut, tut! Try. Try, boy. Why, what could she want? As my partner, you might be a match for even Miss Maceveril."

"Your what, sir?" cried Tom, in surprise, lifting his eyes from the blue-and-red checked table-cover.

"I said my partner, Tom. Yes, that is what I intend to make you: have intended it for some time. We will have no fly-away London jaunts and junkets. Once my partner, of course the world will understand that you will be also my successor: and I think I shall soon retire."

Tom had risen from his seat: for once in his life he was agitated. Mr. Paul rose and put his hand on Tom's shoulder.

"With this position, and a suitable income to back it, Tom, you are a match for Mary Maceveril, or for any other good girl. Go and try her, boy; try your luck."

"But—it is of no use," spoke Tom. "You don't understand, sir."

"No use! Go and try,"—pushing him towards the door. "My wife was one of the proud Wintertons, you know: how should I have gained her but for trying? I did not depreciate myself, and say I'm not good enough for her: I went and asked her to have me."

"But suppose it is not Mary Maceveril, sir?—as indeed it is not. Suppose it is somebody nearer—nearer home?"

"No matter. Go and try, I say."

"I—do—think—you—understand—me, sir!" cried Tom, slowly and dubiously. "I—hope there is no mistake!"

"Rubbish about mistake!" cried old Paul, pushing him towards the door. "Go and do as I bid you. Try."

He went to look for Emma, and saw her sitting under the acacia tree on the bench, which faced the other way. Stepping noiselessly over the grass, he put his arms on her shoulders, and she turned round with a cry. But Tom would not let her go.

"I am told to come out and *try*, Emma. I want a wife, and your papa thinks I may gain one. He is going to make me his partner;

and he says he thinks I am a match for any good girl. And I am not going to London."

She turned pale and red, red and pale, and then burst into a fit of tears and trembling.

"Oh, Tom, can it be true! Oh, Tom, Tom!"

And Tom kissed her for the first time in his life. But not for the last.

The news came out to us in a lump. Tom Chandler was taken into partnership and was to marry Emma. We wished them good luck. She was not to leave her home, for her father would not spare her: she and Tom were to live with him.

"I had to do it, you know, Squire," said old Paul, meeting the Squire one day. "Only children are apt to be wilful. Not that I ever found Emma so. Had I not allowed it, I expect she'd have dutifully saddled herself, an old maid, upon me for life."

"She could not have chosen better," cried the Squire, warmly. "It there's one young fellow I respect above another, it's Tom Chandler, He is good to the back-bone."

"He'd not have got her if he were not; you may rely upon that," concluded old Paul, emphatically.

So the wedding took place at Islip in the autumn, and old Paul gave Tom a month's holiday, and told him he had better take Emma to Paris; as they both seemed, by what he could gather, red-hot to see it.

III.

DRIZZLE, drizzle, drizzle, came down the rain, dropping with monotonous patter on the decaying leaves that strewed the garden. Not the trim well-kept garden it used to be, but showing signs of neglect. What with the long grass, and the lying leaves, and the sloppy roads, and the November skies, nothing could well look more dreary than the world looked to-day, as seen from the windows of North Villa.

Time had gone on, another year, bringing its events and its changes; as time always does bring. The chief change, as connected with this little record, lay in Valentine Chandler. He had gone to the dogs. That was Islip's expression for it, not mine. A baby had come to Tom and Emma.

Little by little, step by step, Valentine had gone down lower and lower. Some people, who are given to bad habits, make spasmodic efforts to reform; but, so far as Islip could see, Valentine never made any. He passed more time at the Bell, or at less respectable public-houses, and drank deeper: and at last neglected his business nearly entirely. Enervated and good for nothing, he would lie in bed till twelve o'clock in the day. To keep on the office seemed only a farce.

Its profits were not enough to pay for its one solitary clerk. Valentine was then pulled up by an illness, which confined him to his bed, and left him in a shaky state. The practice had quite gone then, and the clerk had gone; and Valentine knew that, even though he had had sufficient energy left to try to bring them back, no clients would have returned to him.

He was going to emigrate to Canada. His friends hoped he would be steady there, and redeem the past: he gave fair promises of it. George Chandler (Tom's brother, who was doing very well there now, with a large farm about him, and a wife and children) had undertaken to receive Valentine and help him to employment. So he would have to begin life over again.

It was all so much gall and bitterness to his mother and sisters, and had been for a long while. The tears were dropping through the fingers of Mrs. Chandler now, as she leaned on her hand and watched the dreary rain on the window-panes. With all his faults, she had so loved Valentine. She loved him still, above all the trouble he had brought; and it seemed, this afternoon, just as though her heart would break.

When the business fell off, of course her income fell off also. Valentine was to have paid her a third of the profits, but if he did not make any profits, he could not pay her any. She had the private income, two hundred a year, which Jacob had secured to her: but what was that for a family accustomed to live in the fashion? There is an old saying that necessity has no law: and Mrs. Jacob Chandler and her daughters had proved its truth. One of the girls had gone out as a governess; one was on a prolonged visit to her Aunt Cramp; and Julietta and her mother were to move into a smaller house at Christmas. The practice and the other business, once Valentine's, and his father's before him, had all gone over to the other firm, Paul and Chandler.

"I'm sure I don't know what Georgiana means by writing home for money amidst all our troubles!" cried Mrs. Chandler, fretfully, "She has fifteen pounds a year salary, and she must make that do."

"She says her last quarter's money is all spent, and she can't possibly manage without a new mantle for Sunday," returned Julietta.

"I can't supply it; you know I can't. I am not able to pay my own way now. Let her write to Mrs. Cramp."

"It would be of no use, mamma. Aunt Mary Ann will never help us to clothes. She says we have had too many of them."

"Well, I don't want to be worried with these matters: it's enough for me to think of poor Valentine's things. Only two days now before he starts. And what wretched weather it is!"

"Valentine says he shall not take much luggage with him. He saw me counting his shirts, and he said they were too many by half."

"And who will supply him with shirts out there, do you suppose?"

demanded Mrs. Chandler. "You talk nothing but nonsense, Julietta. Where *is* Valentine? He ought to be here, with all this packing to do. He must have been gone out these two hours."

"He said he had business at Islip."

Mrs. Chandler looked gloomy at the answer. She hated the very name of Islip : partly because they held no longer any part in the place, partly because the Bell was in it.

But Valentine had not gone to the Bell this time. His visit was to his cousin Tom ; and his errand was to beg of Tom to give or lend him a fifty-pound note before sailing.

"I shall have next to nothing in my pocket, Tom, when I land," he urged, as the two sat together in Tom's private room. "If I get on over there, I will pay you back. If I don't—well, perhaps you won't grudge having helped me for the last time."

For a moment Tom did not answer. He sat before his desk-table, Valentine near him : just as Valentine had one day sat at his desk in his private room, and Tom had been the petitioner, not so many years gone by. Valentine looked upon the silence as an ill-omen.

"You have all the business that once was mine in your fingers now, Tom. It has left me for you."

"But not by any wish or seeking of mine, Valentine ; you know that," spoke Tom readily, turning his honest eyes and kindly face on the fallen man. "I wish you were in your office still. There's plenty of work for both of us."

"Well, I am not in it ; and you have got it all. You might lend me such a poor little sum as fifty pounds."

"Of course I mean to lend it : but I was thinking. Look here, Valentine. I will not give it you now ; you cannot want it before sailing : and you might lose it on board," he added laughing. "You shall carry with you an order upon my brother George for one hundred pounds."

"Will George pay it?"

"I will take care of that. He shall get a letter from me by the same mail that takes you out. Stay, Valentine : I will give you the order now."

He wrote what was necessary, sealed it up, and handed it over. Valentine thanked him.

"How is Emma?" he asked as he rose. "And the boy?"

"Quite well, thank you : both. Will you not go in and see them?"

"I think not. You can say good-bye for me. I don't much care to trouble people."

"God bless you, Valentine," said Tom, clasping his hand. "You will begin life anew over there, and may have a happy one yet. One of these days you will be coming back to us, a prosperous man."

Valentine went trudging home through the rain, miserable and

dispirited, and found a visitor had arrived—Mrs. Cramp. His mother and sister were upstairs then, busy over his trunks; so Mrs. Cramp had him all to herself. She had liked Valentine very much. When he went wrong, it put her out frightfully, and since then she had not spared him: which of course put out Valentine.

"Yes, it will be a change," he acknowledged, in reply to a remark of hers. "A flourishing solicitor here, and a servant there. For that's what I shall be over yonder; I conclude; I can't expect to be my own master. You don't know how good the business was, Aunt Mary Ann, at the time my father died. If I could but have kept it!"

"You could not expect to keep it," said Mrs. Cramp, who sat facing him, her bonnet tilted back from her red and comely face, her purple stuff gown pulled up above her boots.

"I should have kept it, but for now and then taking a little drop too much," confessed poor Valentine: who was deeper in the dumps that day than he had ever been before.

"I don't know that," said Mrs. Cramp. "The business was a usurped one."

"A what?" said Valentine.

"There is an over-ruling Power above us, you know," she went on. "I am quite sure, Valentine—I have learnt it by experience—that injustice never answers in the long run. It may seem to succeed for a time; but it does not last: it cannot and it does not. If a man rears himself on another's downfall, causing himself that downfall that he may rise, his prosperity rests on no sure foundation. In some way or another the past comes home to him; and he suffers for it, if not in his own person, in that of his children. Ill-gotten riches bring a curse, never a blessing."

"What a growler you are, Aunt Mary Ann!"

"I don't mean it for growling, Valentine. It is true."

"It's not true."

"Not true! The longer I live the more examples I see of it. A man treads another down that he may rise himself: and there he stands high and flourishing. But wait a few years, and look then. He is gone. Gone, and no trace of his prosperity left. And when I mark that, I recall that verse in the Psalms of David: 'I went by, and lo, he was gone: I sought him, but his place was nowhere to be found.' That verse is a true type of real life, Valentine."

"I don't believe it," cried Valentine. "And where's the good of having the Psalms at your finger-ends?"

"You do believe it. Why, Valentine, take your own case. Was there ever a closer exemplification? Tom was injured; put down; I may say, crushed by you and your father. Yes, crushed: crushed out of his rights. *His* father made the business; and the half of it, at any rate, ought to have been Tom's. Instead of that, your father deposed

him and usurped it. He repented when he was dying, and charged you to remedy the wrong. But you did not; *you* usurped it. And what has it ended in?"

"Ended in?" cried Valentine vacantly.

"You are—as you are; ruined in character, in pocket, in reputation; and Tom is respected and flourishing. The business has left you and gone to him; not through any seeking of his, but through your own doings entirely; the very self-same business that his father made has in the natural course of time and events gone back to him—and he is not thirty yet. It is retribution, nephew. Justice has been righting herself; and man could neither stay nor hinder it."

"What nonsense!" debated Valentine testily. "Suppose I had been steady: would the business have left me for Tom then?"

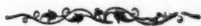
"Yes. In some inscrutable way, that we see not, it would. I am sure of it. You would no more have been allowed to triumph to the end on your ill-gotten gains, than I could stand if I went out and perched myself on yonder weathercock," affirmed Mrs. Cramp, growing warm. "Your father kept his place, it is true; but what a miserable man he always was, and without any ostensible cause."

"I wonder you don't set up for a parson, Aunt Mary Ann! This is as good as a sermon."

"Then carry the sermon in your memory through life, Valentine. Our doings, whether they be good or ill, bring back their fruits. In some wonderful manner that we cannot understand, events are always shaping onwards their own true ends, their appointed destiny, and working out the will of Heaven."

That's all. And the Squire seemed to take a leaf out of Mrs. Cramp's book. For ever so long afterwards, he would tell us to read a lesson from the history of the Chandlers, and to remember that none can deal unjustly in the sight of God without having to account for it sooner or later.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



OLD HUNDRED.

By ANNE BEALE.

FOLLOWING the windings of a certain Welsh primrose lane, we at length reach a pretty cottage in its midst. Yes, it is a pretty cottage, although the walls of its one story are of mud, the windows small, the thatch weather-stained—for it is covered with creepers that, a few months' hence, will be a mass of blossom. As it is placed upon the bank, we ascend a few rough steps to the wicket-gate, and leaving the primrose-bank beneath us, enter the trim garden. A quickset hedge of hawthorn, gooseberry-bushes, privet, roses, and periwinkles effectually shuts out the lane. We glance over it, and see the loveliest of landscapes beneath us. Broad meadows, dotted with sheep and black cattle, spread their ample skirts on either side a winding river, upon which fall the sun's rays, making its smooth surface appear like a twisting snake with burnished skin. Masses of wood, just donning their green clothing, rise one above another in the levels, and in the distance a range of blue mountains forbids the gaze to penetrate beyond. A warm, soft haze hangs over the landscape, and gives a lagging, doubtful joy to these first spring days, when the languid mind and weary limbs need excitement to rouse them into the exhilaration that a few weeks of such bright weather will naturally bring.

But there is nothing exciting in this quiet cottage. No sound of woman's laughter or childhood's mirth bids you be cheerful and awakes you to a consciousness of busy life. All is perfect repose, and perfect neatness. We tap at the usually open door, and peep in at the windows, but receive no answering "Who is there?" The dwelling is untenanted, but not so the garden. The songs of a hundred birds gladden your heart as you stand to listen. Tread lightly, and you may, perhaps, find some one at home in that tiny dwelling in the hawthorn hedge. A bright redbreast on the spray above proclaims the inmate a bullfinch; and whilst we peep into his little house, and see his mate seated on her eggs, we cause him a flutter and cry of distress that we do not willingly listen to. We are glad to hear the short, full whistle again, as we leave the neighbourhood of the nest and walk round the garden. The flower-beds have already many of the blossoms of spring in them. Here are patches of various-hued polyanthus, early hyacinths, with their faint, sickly perfume, and languishing bells, rich and golden double cowslips, one or two lingering crocuses, and a well-tended plant of single anemone. Here, again, is a wide-spreading root of Russian

violet, and one or two of white violet, scenting the air with an unusual perfume; for the sweet violet, alas! does not grow wild in these parts. At the back, up the slope, is a garden of primroses. The glorious daffodil, too, so favoured by the poets, hangs its large golden head hard by.

In a sunshiny spot near the primroses, we come upon a little sheet of white. This portion of the garden is tended with great care. Not a weed hinders the growth of the precious strawberry plant, or intercepts the progress of the pure white flower. Not far off is a bed of fragrant and useful herbs—thyme, mint, and sage in abundance; while in their midst is a bush of southernwood, called by the country-folks boy's love. Under the very eye of the sun, we have lavender and rosemary, as modest of flower as fragrant of leaf; and everywhere the shining leaves of the periwinkle give promise of that bright blue flower. Crowning this pretty garden at the back is a large wild cherry-tree, that flings its white garments on all sides, and looks protectingly on the lowly cot it overshadows. Beyond the neat hedge at the right is another sloping garden, prepared for potatoes and other vegetables, in which fruit-bushes and apple-trees also appear.

Not long ago, this cottage and garden belonged to a very old woman, who might usually be seen seated at its door. She is worth describing, as she was said to be a hundred-and-nine years old, and we believe she was so. Indeed, it would be a long and troublesome work to search the register for the certificates of birth of all the men and women buried in the mountainous districts of this country who had lived over a hundred years. This one, known as "Old Hundred," looked her age. She was lean, wrinkled, and purblind; and had none of the outward comeliness of old age. But she was always scrupulously clean, and neatly, if coarsely, dressed. She wore the woollen gown and checked apron of her class, had a yellow handkerchief pinned over her shoulders, and a blue one drawn tightly over her cap, two corners of which were fastened under her chin, while the others hung down her back. A white cap-border surrounded her wizened face, and a high, antiquated beaver hat completed the head-gear. There was the same air of quiet contentment about her that pervaded the cottage. She held a half-knitted woollen stocking in her hand, to which she added slowly, and with evident difficulty, stitch after stitch, never ceasing from her painful and monotonous labour. She had been accustomed thus to keep her hands employed all her life, when not engaged in field work; and when they were almost paralysed with rheumatism, she still "dragged on the lengthening chain."

Nearly a hundred years of toil in house, field, and garden seems almost mythical; nevertheless, Old Hundred had passed through them, as was well authenticated, not only by herself, but the dwellers around her. She had a wonderful memory and unimpaired hearing, and was

always well pleased to talk over the events of her life. She was the chronicle of village histories, and also remembered the births, majorities, and deaths of all the squires in the neighbourhood. Although no politician, she knew that she had seen out four kings, and lived far into the reign of our beloved Queen Victoria. She recalled so many elections and county members that she wearied herself and her listeners by recounting them; and as for superstitions, her mind was full of them.

She had lived all these years unmarried, although she was wont to say, as most single ladies do, that it was her own fault.

"I might have married dozens of times," she would affirm proudly, "but it didn't suit me. I liked to be independent, and work for myself. I have always been seeing that men are of no use in the world but to smoke and drink."

Still this strong-minded old lady began to feel lonely when lovers no longer sought her; and after she had waded through more than half a century in solitary state, she took to herself—not a helpmeet for her—but a stray parish infant. She would tell the story in this wise: "I was by when they were taking the poor orphan to the workhouse, and her cries went to my heart. She had nobody belonging to her, and I was very lone, so says I, 'Give you the baby to me, and I'll nurse her.' They gave her to me, and I grew so fond of her, as if I were her mother. The parish paid me so much a week for her till she was four years old, then that old relieving officer came, and said she must go to the workus school to have some learning. 'Learning,' says I, 'why she's a God Almighty's innocent.' And so she was. My Janny wasn't wise, but she was a sight better than many that think themselves so. I offered to keep her and bring her up, if they 'ould be paying me half a crown a week: but they 'ouldn't give me a farthing. They tried to take her away, but she screamed till I thought the old walls 'ould be falling, so says I, 'Come you, Janny. Here's a pair of arms as 'll be working for you;' and, name o' goodness! she tumbled into 'em, and there she stopped. The parish got rid of her, and I had a blessing."

This Janny was a wonder to everyone. As Old Hundred said, she was not wise; that is to say, she could acquire no book lore, and was backward in most things: but she was so gentle and affectionate that, as she grew up, she became a sort of parish saint. She was devoted to her benefactress, helpful to her neighbours, and, in her unobtrusive way, a mute teacher to many. If Old Hundred scolded, she never complained; if food was scarce, she never murmured; and if she were weak and sick, she endured. She had a love of flowers so intense that she managed to rear them as no one else could, and the wretched hut in which she then lived was always fragrant with their scent. Every old teapot or cracked basin became a flower-pot, and the one half-glazed window and barren ground in front of it were filled with blossoms. She was a regular attendant at church, rarely failing to be

present at three services on Sundays, and one at least in the week. She was never tired of listening to preaching, or following funerals, and her constancy in such exercises had its effect on Old Hundred, who was not reckoned "a godly woman" by her acquaintances.

When Old Hundred was between seventy and eighty years old, and Janny was grown up, she began to wonder what would become of her adopted child when she was gone. She could not get her living like other girls, and maybe she would be taken to the workhouse after all. Flowers were her delight, and by them she must live: but how? Old Hundred had money in the savings-bank. How she had contrived to accumulate it nobody knew. She had spent her days in hard labour in the fields, while Janny had kept house meekly and tidily, alternately "cleaning up," knitting, and tending her flowers. Janny's earnings had been scanty, consisting of the sale of a pair of stockings or a bunch of flowers now and then on market days. However, Old Hundred was not only strong-minded but energetic, and, at past seventy, resolved to build her a house. After much bartering, she procured a bit of waste wayside, hedge-row land at a ground rent of one pound per annum. She was still hale and kept her "strong arms," so, with Janny's help, she dug and delved until she levelled a square piece of the ground as a foundation. This accomplished, they slowly raised four mud walls, leaving spaces for the door and a window on either side. Old Hundred displayed not only architectural but mathematical genius, for she had her "first principles" well defined. "Straight as a line, thick, and even," were her orders to Janny. And so the two women worked on, refusing other aid—worked only at odd hours—until they reached the chimney. "The chimbley daunted me," quoth Old Hundred, "for I wasn't tall enough; so I got big Tom Nicholas to put him up, and bad enough he was doing it. Take the cup and pipe from the mouths of them men, and they are fit for nothing but to gaape. And he was making my chimbley smoke almost as much as himself."

Nevertheless, the shell was completed after many months' labour. It would be hard to say how the women rafted and thatched it, but that task was also accomplished. When to this was added a door, bestowed by a neighbouring farmer, and two windows, each containing four panes of glass, the capability of the fair sex to achieve all that the darker do can no longer be disputed. The plastering, white and yellow washing, and general ornamentation were comparatively easy: "and then," said Old Hundred, proudly, "I had a house of my own. I was only seventy, and Janny was gone twenty. I counted upon making my fourscore, and then leaving her the house; but here I am still, and Janny a'most as old as I was then!"

Yes, they lived nearly forty years together in this hut. Janny, the weaker vessel, became the stronger. Early and late was the simple-

mindful woman to be seen in the garden—digging, watering, pruning, planting, training, with a love and patience the wisest might have envied. A love, too, so pure and unselfish that an angel need not have blushed to own it—a love for the only friend she had ever known, and for those most beautiful of the Father's works—flowers. Her old friend was first in her affections, her flowers second, while in her heart dwelt a simple religion that taught her to love God without fear. Poor Janny was not wise, but she was good and humble, and possibly the wisest of us might envy her.

As years went on, she tended the guardian of her childhood and youth with unobtrusive care, perceiving intuitively that Old Hundred did not like to be thought slowly but surely passing work. We none of us do. It was a pleasure to enter the cottage, as well as to stand without. The room was as neat as hands could make it. The chimney-corner shone with wash of every hue, the hearth and hot-ball fire were whitened, the mud floor displayed an occasional brick reddened by ruddle, the little windows were full of geraniums.

Old Hundred possessed an oak corner cupboard and chest that would have delighted the antiquary. They were carved and blackened by age, and under Janny's care shone like ebony. So did the less valuable furniture. Within the cupboard was a display of china, as dear to its possessors as is the antiquated porcelain of this our age to the ladies bitten by chinamania.

Old Hundred, although born gifted with independence, was too strong-minded to object to parish relief when the root of her independence—her strength—grew rotten in the ground. But they well-nigh lived on the garden, for the parish half-crown could not keep them. In summer-time people came from Trefavon to see the old woman, and question her about her age. This led to tea and strawberries in the pretty garden, and the purchase of fruit and flowers. It was pleasant to see Old Hundred surrounded by smart young people, while Janny busily prepared hot water and tea-cups, and gathered her treasures. On these occasions, the elder would pour forth her history, while the younger served.

"Yes, I'm in my hundred and eight. I knew your great great grandfather, as was Lawyer Penruddock, Trefavon, and a shark he was, yes sure. See you Janny! They are saying she's by the head, and she is doing everything. I haven't earned anything to speak of these ten years or more, but she works for me. When the weather is warm, she is putting me here by the door while she goes to town to sell her garden stuff. When she comes back, she helps me into the house, and makes me a cup o' tea, with sugar and white bread, and a pinch o' snuff. The Lord had his intentions when he put into my mind to bring up the orphan. If I had followed that old relieving officer's advice, and sent her to the workus, I should be there myself now, and the parish

wishing me dead. Now they take a pride in me, because I've lived my five score years and ten, born, growed, and aged, amongst 'em. Very little makes us proud. For my part, I'm not proud, for if my life seems long to them 'tis short to me, though I've earnt my bread and been beholden to nobody for four-score years. Show me the man as can say as much. Ha ! ha ! But Janny's turning sixty now, and 'tis time I was gone, or she'll be getting weak and old likewise. Still I'm happy with her, and she'll be lonesome without me. But I bide the Lord's time. He knows best."

While we have been recalling Old Hundred's history, the spring sun has turned the world into sunset gold, and the birds are beginning to twitter sleepily. Still the cottage is untenanted. Where is Janny? We know where her benefactress is. She has ended her long life peacefully, and sleeps her still longer sleep in yonder churchyard. A few months ago, her death and great age were recorded in the local papers, and people speculated upon them, as we do when anything occurs beyond the usual run of events. But few thought of Janny, who was the only human being to weep over the aged woman's grave. She, who had been told to expect her friend's death for forty years, did not realize it when it came. Who does? But her lonely heart sank never to rise into cheerful pulsation again.

Old Hundred died in winter, so Janny had not even the consolation of her flowers. She had lost her all at once. She must have starved but for kind friends—for everyone liked the gentle, simple woman. But a change came with her first snowdrop, and it was curious to see that life had once more a charm for her. She began mechanically to watch one flower after another arise from its winter sleep, and then to arrange her garden. The first snowdrops were transplanted to her friend's grave, and were succeeded by primrose and violet roots, so that Janny had soon two gardens to tend, for as long as the parish would let her. It was evident that she could no longer support herself. She might keep her cottage and garden neat, and, from long habit, sell her flowers and fruit, but this was not sufficient. The parish was appealed to, and asked to continue the small dole awarded to Old Hundred, but the board refused. So long as Janny possessed a smart cottage and productive flower-garden, she could not need parish relief. She must leave them, and go into the union-house. It was certainly the least expensive measure, for she would soon die deprived of her flowers.

Influential friends have interceded for her, but hitherto without success. During Old Hundred's life, she was accustomed to go weekly to the union to receive the half-crown, and we understand she continues, habitually, the visit. We suddenly remember that this is Saturday, and that she has been engaged on the quest to-day; if so, she cannot be long in returning, for she is not given to tarry: so we will wait and see

what success she has had. Half a crown a week. It does not seem much, but her life hangs on it.

We inhale the perfume of the violets, and recall the days when it was happiness to hunt them out from the furze bushes and thorns of common and hedge-row; then we lament over their absence from this wild country, as indigenous gifts. But next to gathering them in the fields is culling them in a cottage garden, so we rob Janny of one or two, and are thankful that God has bestowed on rich and poor alike the common treasures of fresh air, perfume, and sweet sound.

There *is* Janny walking up the primrose lane! Her step is certainly more elastic than when we met last. Now she stoops towards the primroses, now looks into the hawthorn-hedge as if to see whether the buds are bursting. She has an empty basket on her arm, an old grey cloak over her shoulders, and a tidy crape-bound hat on her head. She is a spare, weakly woman with a calm, pale face, but nothing hard, vulgar, or coarse in form or expression. She holds her head on one side, and drops her slight figure like a water-rush. It is her way. Knowing her story, you look upon her with pity, respect, and a certain amount of affection. She toils up the little steps in the primrose-bank, opens the wicket in the hedge, and seeing us, approaches almost briskly. She holds up a half-crown, exclaiming, "They have given it to me again. I may stay on here. I may keep my flowers. I shall die where mother died, and sleep where she sleeps. It is the Lord's will."

This unusually long speech overcomes her, and she bursts into tears. We accompany her into the cottage, admire its neatness, ask for some tea, and so help her to begin life again. She looks about her dreamily, then awakes to dim consciousness of existence. That parish half-crown has set the machine going once more, and promises of future strawberry parties and flower buyers help to turn the wheels.

"Poor old mother!" she says, meekly, glancing at the door where Old Hundred sat.

"She is here, only you cannot see her," we venture.

"Then I will put her chair."

A smile kindles the pale face as Janny rises and reverently places the seat near the open door.

All is as it should be: she is no longer alone. In some strange way she realizes the unseen.

As we take our departure, she makes a nosegay. Wall-flowers, daffodils, primroses, and the one treasured anemone are fastened together, while a separate bunch of violets is carefully added. The face has lost its trouble and resumed its calm.

"She will be happy again within the mud walls she helped to rear," we murmur, as we wander back through the primrose lane.

A BROKEN VOYAGE.

THIS narrative is true in all its details. It has often been in my mind to give it to the public. Though I do not know that I should ever have done so, but for the attention lately called to the subject by Mr. Plimsoll. Unfortunately, as I have learnt since, it is but one case out of many.

Some few years ago, in the month of January, I had been on shore about four weeks, and was thinking of going afloat again, when the following letter was delivered to my father by the morning post.

"THE MITRE, LIVERPOOL, *January 21st.*

"MY DEAR SIR,—I arrived here a few days since, and am well pleased with my new command—the Asia. If your son is still disengaged, he may join at once as second officer. Hoping you are well, I am,

"Yours very truly,

"JOHN ENGLISH."

"Who is he?" I asked. "Do you know him?"

"I don't know much of him. I was introduced to him a week or two ago by a firm of brokers in the City, where I had called to say you were looking out for a berth. Captain English told me he was going to Liverpool to take the command of a fine ship chartered for India. He seemed a very agreeable man, and I think you cannot do better than accept this offer."

Down I went to Liverpool, all prepared. The Mitre proved to be a comfortable inn near the river and to the dock in which the ship lay; and I hastened to report myself.

"Is Captain English within?" I inquired of a smart, merry-looking young woman in the bar. Instead of replying, she took a rapid but comprehensive survey of me, and spoke: "I suppose you are the second mate?" This was tolerably cool, I thought; however, I could but answer in the affirmative.

"The captain has just gone out. He expected you this afternoon, and left word that if you arrived you could wait for him: he won't be long away. Will you walk into the parlour and sit down?"

I preferred to take a walk out and look at the neighbourhood. In half an hour I went back again, but Captain English had not returned. I began relating to the barmaid a ludicrous accident I had just witnessed, and we were both laughing over it, when she suddenly stopped, and spoke.

"Oh, here is Captain English."

A tall, rather portly, pleasant-looking man of about five-and-forty years was entering. I liked his looks directly, stepped forward, and introduced myself.

"Ah, Mr. W.," he replied, in a rich, cheery tone, as he held out his hand to me, "I am glad to see you. There is a deal of work going on on board, and we have wanted you badly for some days past. Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere as yet, sir."

"Come and stay here, then. You can't do better; and the charges are reasonable."

For some reasons I should have preferred living away from the captain's quarters. However, the hint could not be ignored, and my room was ordered.

I found later that the landlord of this inn was one Richard Prim, a retired skipper, who had once been a shipmate of Captain English. Prim had a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and the Mitre flourished accordingly. He also carried on the business of ship's smith, and did well at it.

"Now," said Captain English to me, "you had better go and take a look at the ship, and make acquaintance with Mr. Sterner, the chief officer. You will then be all ready for turning in in the morning at six o'clock."

"Very good, sir; I'll go at once," was my answer. And I had reached the doorway when he called me back.

"Mr. W., I have a word to say:" and his blue eyes darkened and looked hard and stern. Until now he had been all smiles and good humour, and the change was striking. It gave me his measure at once: a good master to a good man: but the saints help the one who did not please him.

"Mr. W.," he began, carefully shutting the parlour door, "I like your appearance. Judging from your testimonials, I believe you will suit me: and I will, for your sake, offer you a word of advice. Give the two barmaids in this house a wide berth. One is the daughter of the landlord, the other is his niece. They are lively, good-natured young women, but rather free and easy."

I wondered what on earth he was driving at.

"Don't get too intimate with them. That's all.—You can go on board now. You will not find things looking very cheerful there. The ship has been lying up for some months, and looks dirty and out of order. The dust from the cargo, too, does not improve matters. However, we'll get her to rights by-and-by."

It was barely five minutes' walk to the ship. As I went along I reflected upon the captain's "one bit of advice." I could make nothing of it, and never could afterwards. It puzzled me: not so

much then as later. The two damsels were "free and easy" as to laughing and talking, but I saw no other harm in them. A sudden turn, and I came in sight of the Asia. One glance at her masts told me she was American built. In another minute I was standing alongside of her on the dock quay. The captain's description was not overdrawn. I thought I had never before seen a ship in such an untidy, filthy state. It gave me the blues to look at her.

The Asia was what is called, in America, "down-east built," about 1500 tons burthen. There was a deck-house, aft, for the captain and officers, and one between the fore and main hatchways for the crew. It contained also a sail locker, store-room, and the galley. A short topgallant forecastle and a "monkey" poop completed the deck plan.

She was being loaded with patent fuel. Square blocks of coal dust, tar, &c., compressed together, each about a foot long and half as thick. Many of these were piled up on the deck, and some were lying about, loose and broken. Everything was coated thickly with dust from the stuff: decks, masts, houses, bulwarks, &c. The weather had been showery during the day, and the rain had washed the dust and dirt off in streaks and patches all about the ship: the little pools on the decks looked like ink. Most of the rigging was adrift. Some of the yards were across, others on deck, and all "anyhow"; the tops of the deck-houses were lumbered up, several feet high, with all sorts of gear: hawsers, ropes, oars, spare planks. Altogether she was a most melancholy object. I was contemplating the state of things, when the chief officer came out of the cabin. His appearance was in keeping with the ship's. His face was grimed with dust, and the rain had drawn streaks on it as on the sides of the houses. He was a little man, good-tempered looking, about forty apparently.

Mr. Sterner did not know much about the ship. When he joined her, a few days before, only the ship-keeper was by the ship, which had been brought round from the North by a crew of runners, and he had been engaged since she came into dock. Sterner told me the Asia was the property of a very rich man, who had recently gone into the shipowning line. She was the first of a numerous fleet he intended to sail. The Europe and India Steamship Company had chartered her to convey patent fuel to Calcutta, and she was to load for home at some one or other of the Indian ports. He thought she looked like a pretty good sea-boat. She was dirty and a perfect wreck aloft, but the riggers and painters would alter that. A large quantity of stores had come down from London, and waited my arrival to be taken on board. I returned to the Mitre not at all captivated by the ship's appearance.

The next morning, shortly after six o'clock, I went on board. Four hands were pumping the ship out, not at all a usual operation in dock. After about twenty minutes, seeing she did not "suck," I

inquired of the chief officer how long she had been standing. "Since last night," he replied. "We pump her out at six o'clock, morning and evening."

"What a deal of water she must make!"

"Pretty well; but she has been lying up all last summer. Her top sides are bound to leak a goodish bit as the cargo puts her down in the water. They'll 'take up' by-and-by."

This was reasonable enough, and I thought no more of it at the time, although it took three-quarters of an hour to dry her out.

When I found this continued as a regular thing, night and morning, I did not half like it, and seized an opportunity of taking a look at the ship below. She seemed pretty old, and looked as if she had been used to hard work and plenty of it. There was nothing in particular, however, to complain of, that I could see. The captain said she'd take up by-and-by; the mate seemed quite complacent about it all; so I could only make up my mind that matters would be all right in time.

We were to sail in about a week's time, and everything had yet to be done to get the ship ready for sea. In all my experience I never had such a week's work before or since. Nearly all the stores came from London. The owner would have the best of everything, and plenty of it; and the best could only, he believed, be procured there. The ship, certainly, was found in a most liberal manner. The pay was good—as high as on board any sailing ship in the port; and judging from the quantity of luxuries, wines, &c., put on board, we were to live like fighting-cocks. Even the new sails were sent down from London—and a nice job they gave us. Of course not one fitted properly. They had all to be unbent and carted up to a sail-loft, costing no end of money for alterations. Even then they never "set" properly. Before the end of the week the loading was completed, and all things were ship-shape. One could scarcely have recognized in the clean, smart-looking ship, the dirty wreck of a few days ago.

It was on the second day after I joined, that the owner, Mr. Buckle, had arrived at the Mitre from London. "Very condescending in so rich and great a man to take up his quarters here," remarked Miss Prim, "but he does it to be with Captain English."

Mr. Buckle was a most courteous, gentlemanly man, wearing light gold-rimmed spectacles. His face looked kindness itself. He came frequently on board, and quite won the hearts of all hands by his kindness and suavity. He was liberal to a degree. The officers had only to suggest to him that a thing was required, and it was ordered at once. One day, in shifting the hawser, I noticed several rotten places in it. Mr. Buckle was standing by at the time, and I pointed it out to him. A new hawser was ordered instantly. In short, although the bulk of the stores and other things had come from London, many

articles had to be got in Liverpool; ship-chandlers, sail-makers, and others were extensively patronised by Mr. Buckle. Prim got his share of it by supplying new anchors, a chain cable, and no end of ironwork. It oozed out that Mr. Buckle was about purchasing a monster of a ship in London, to follow the *Asia* out of Liverpool. All the tradespeople, including Prim, looked forward to making a rare good thing out of Mr. Buckle's ship. Towards me he seemed to have a special favour, and whispered, as he shook hands with me at parting, that I should get a chief's berth next time in one of his magnificent ships. Three days before we sailed, Mr. Buckle returned to London.

Nevertheless, I could not feel easy in my mind about the ship herself—the *Asia*. She certainly made somewhat less water day by day: but she leaked far too much, in my opinion, for a ship lying quietly in dock. Besides this, she was very deep in the water. The freight was high. The more cargo she carried, the more money the owner would pocket. This was evidently the principle which had regulated the quantity taken on board. And she was loaded, as the saying goes, "like a sand barge." The chief officer and I talked it over. He did not seem at all anxious. The captain laughed outright at the whole thing, only repeating that she'd "take up" by-and-by.

We signed articles the day Mr. Buckle left—a Friday—and a first-rate crew we got, nearly all Welshmen. One of them, David Evans, was equal to any two men in Liverpool. He was about six feet and a half high—broad and strong in proportion. I mentally decided to have him in my watch, if possible. Monday was our sailing day. Indeed, we were *now* ready for sea, and only waited for water enough to float us over the dock sill.

On the Saturday morning I went on board at six o'clock. There was no general work doing; I had merely to see that the ship was properly pumped out. As usual, there was a good deal of water in her—far more than I liked to see. On returning to the Mitre for breakfast, I found the place in a commotion. Captain English had gone suddenly mad.

"Mad!" I said to one of the barmaids, Julia, who had given me the information and was crying over it. "What is it that you mean? Captain English was well and hearty last night."

"All the same, Mr. W., he is mad now. The doctor can make nothing of him, poor gentleman."

Captain English was in bed, and I went to his room. He gazed steadily at me. My first thought was, "Well, if he is mad, he does not look it." I had never seen *intelligence* more plainly shine out of a pair of eyes. "Good morning, sir," I said, advancing to the bed-side. "I am sorry to hear you are not well." His reply startled me: although it was given in his usual tone and manner.

"Ah, Mr. Sterner, good morning. All ready for sea, eh! Very well;

"I'll be on board presently. You can be passing the hawser in the meanwhile."

I looked across the bed at the doctor. An expressive lifting of the eyebrows was his only response. At that moment Mrs. Prim came in. "Mary Ann," he said to her (and we all knew this to be the name of a servant-maid in his house in London), "tell Mrs. English to have my things looked out. I am going to Liverpool this afternoon."

He was evidently quite out of his mind. "What can have caused it?" I asked of the doctor, beckoning him out of the room.

"Can't say," was the answer, given with a shrug of the shoulders. "It seems a most singular case. Quite well last night on going to bed, and mad this morning. He does not *look* mad either: that is the most curious part of it. His eye is as steady and calm as possible."

"Will he soon recover?"

"Don't know at all. I cannot give an opinion just yet. We must wait and see how the day passes. If, towards evening, there is no change, Doctor Sims should be called in. He is by far the best man in these cases."

After breakfast, Prim telegraphed to Mr. Buckle, asking instructions. Back came the answer, "I am extremely distressed at the sad news. You will receive a letter from me to-morrow morning."

In the evening there was no improvement. Captain English was constantly rambling in his mind—talking nonsense on twenty different subjects. At one time he imagined himself at home. Then in Liverpool. Sometimes he was on board, giving orders. I went into the room during the dinner hour. As I opened the door he fixed his eyes upon me. "Come in, Mr. W." His look was all intelligence: he evidently recognized me. But he was fancying himself on board at sea. "How is her head, Mr. W.? How's the wind?" he continued; and it seemed that he was imagining answers to his questions. "West nor'-west, eh! Stiff breeze! Inclining to free? Very good. Keep her off a point, and check the upper yards a bit. And, I say, don't be afraid of her. Everything is good aloft. Cost enough in Liverpool. You can give her a good hard lick. There, that'll do. If the wind frees, keep her up a point again. Let me know if there is any change." All this, of itself, was as lucid as possible. His eyes, above all, astonished me—still as clear and steady as could be.

Dr. Sims was called in; and came. I was present. He put a few questions to the captain, but received such extravagant, absurd answers that he soon ceased asking any. He inquired of Mrs. Prim about his habits. "Did he drink?" "Oh dear, no," she replied; "quite the contrary. Scarcely took a glassful of ale with his dinner." "Had he experienced any trouble of late?" "No, not that she ever heard of. He had been a good deal worried about the ship during the

last week ; getting her ready for sea. There were so many things he had to think of."

Doctor Sims could make nothing of the case—said it quite set at naught all his previous experience. The captain was as quiet as need be—taking his meals regularly, as usual.

In the morning a letter arrived from the owner. It was impossible for him to leave London just then. Prim was requested to take the management of affairs, and, if necessary, appoint a commander to the Asia in the place of Captain English. The ship must absolutely *sail to time*.

Well, the end of it was, that a Captain Roberts was appointed. Prim knew him well, and he was looking out for a ship. Our spirits sank to zero when we saw the man. At least, mine did ; I can't answer for Sterner's. The new skipper was a "caution" ; ugly, discourteous, stern ; nothing of his face to be seen for hair, except a narrow strip of forehead, and a nose that curled up like a dog's tail. Worse than all, he was utterly uncultivated ; bearish and surly, and seemed never in his life to have spoken with gentlemen. We could not help ourselves. All who had signed articles with Captain English *must* sail in the ship, or desert. This *I* could not do. The spirit was willing ; but the penalty attaching was an effectual disperser of rebellious thoughts.

I believe every man on board shared my feelings, more or less, in this respect. The contrast Captain Roberts presented to his predecessor was enough to account for the fact. They had signed to sail under a gentleman. Nothing, scarcely, would have induced them to do so with so rough, evil-looking, and common a skipper.

Monday morning broke in due course. The weather was dull, but mild for the time of year. The wind westerly and light. We left the dock at ten o'clock. Collected on the pier-head to bid us a last "pleasant voyage" were most of the tradesmen who had supplied the ship, Prim amongst them.

Captain English was said to be improving. The doctors thought there was a change for the better. Prim called this out to me. "I hope he is ; I'm awfully sorry it ever happened," I answered, significantly.

"Slack away, off there ; slack away !" roared out the pilot. "What the deuce are you about ?" Talking to Prim, I had allowed the stern rope to slacken a little.

"Slack it is. All slack aft !" And we passed out between the pier-heads. The last thing I heard as we got into the river was a remark of the dock-keeper to one of his men.

"I say, Ned, she's thundering deep for the voyage she's going !"

He might well say so. She *was* deep. Frightfully deep for a leaky ship. I vow I felt half heart-sick as I thought of it all : the overladen, leaky ship, and the new skipper. There existed no compulsory survey, no load-line. Such things were not talked of then.

We cleared the dock, and, with a powerful tug ahead, made good way down the river. Our orders were to tow past Holyhead, well into the Irish Channel. The next morning the wind had "northered" a little, so we made sail; the tug cast off our hawser, and wishing us luck, steamed back toward Liverpool.

For four days we had a leading wind, light to moderate, with smooth water, which took us well away from the land. On the fifth day it backed into the south-west, but kept moderate.

All this time the ship did not seem to make any more water. Every four hours she was pumped, and a quarter of an hour's good spell generally sucked her dry.

On the sixth day after we left Liverpool, the wind freshened up, a heavy swell setting in at the same time from the south'ard and west'ard. At nightfall we could just carry topgallant-sails. The barometer fell slowly but steadily. At 11 P.M. the topgallant-sails were furled. The ship was pitching a good deal, and at seven bells there was a long spell of pumping out.

The glass continued steadily falling, but the wind did not increase any more till noon. The upper fore and maintop-sails were reefed and the mizzen one furled. The sea and swell had much increased. What was of far more importance, our leak (or leaks) had increased also. It took us nearly three-quarters of an hour every four hours to pump the ship out.

That night, about ten o'clock, the gale, which had been gradually working its way across the Atlantic, came up to us. It *was* a gale, rattling down upon the ship at last all at once, like a cartload of bricks. The weather was fearful. The night was dark as pitch. The wind blew half a hurricane. The rain fell in sheets, while the sea made clean breaches over the ship, nearly drowning us at times, and keeping us up to the knees in water on deck. To crown all, it was bitterly cold.

Working under such circumstances was half killing. Landsmen can form no idea of it: or of the terrible hardships Jack—and his master too—encounter at times. I, a hardened sailor, sometimes wonder how it is done, and borne.

For eight solid hours we worked away. I expected we should never get the sails in "whole." At length we had the ship hove to under the lower maintop-sail. We were all tired out, but there was no rest for us. After a meal of salt beef and biscuit, washed down with cold water, and, oh luxury! seasoned with a pipe, the ship had to be pumped out.

"All hands pump ship," was now the order. It took *four hours* to dry her out. This was fearful. One watch was then told to "go below," and all hands were sent to breakfast.

The wind had continued to blow as hard as ever. The heavy cross

sea increased, and the ship laboured and strained continually. The chief officer and I could appreciate how well she had "taken up." Instead of taking up she had opened out, and now leaked like a basket. And no wonder. An old, worn-out, soft-wood ship, loaded like a sand barge with patent fuel.

Of all cargoes it is one of the very worst ; the most trying to a ship. It is heavy, stows very close, and has about as much spring in it as so much lead. The poor old hooker was shaken to pieces.

All that day and next night the wind and sea continued unchanged. The pumps were scarcely left. But for the good, powerful, new ones, lately fitted, the ship would have gone down like a stone under our feet. Probably not one life would have been saved : for what could the boats have done in such a terrible sea ? And the chances are, the boats would have been knocked to pieces in the getting out. There was nothing for it but to keep on pumping, and hope for moderate weather.

Alas, our hopes proved vain. The wind continued. It was a fearful time. The ship pitched and rolled and lurched most heavily. She was literally knocked about like a cork in the tremendous cross sea running. The decks were constantly half full of water. Occasionally a heavier wave than usual would break on board, carrying all before it, and washing away the men from the pumps. We were all more or less bruised and otherwise injured—officers as well as men. Since the bad weather set in, the former had taken their full share of pumping, and more than their share of the other work. The captain was the only "officer," now : the constant pumping had made the rest of the ship's company on a perfect equality as regards work. This constant pumping was very trying. At last we got bell ropes fitted—short ropes with an iron ring (called a thimble) spliced into one end. The thimbles were slipped over the handles, and the men "tailed on" to the ropes to pull the handles round. This was much less fatiguing than the incessant bending over them.

Morning broke on the third day, and there was no sign of the weather moderating. The leaking had increased ; and the pumps, going all the time, scarcely kept her free. It seemed as though we were doomed to a watery grave.

At about eight o'clock the men came aft in a body, and asked to speak to the captain. Big David Evans was spokesman.

The skipper came out of his cabin. "Well, men, what is it?"

"Well, now, Captain Roberts, you see we have very hard work. It's not watch and watch now. It's all hands day and night, and we are getting very tired. And besides, we are up to the neck in water when she ships a heavy sea. Any way, the decks are half full of water all the time, and we are all wet through and the weather is very cold. There is plenty of grog on board : you might give us some rum."

The request was refused. Captain Roberts assured the men that to give rum, or any similar poison, would be against his "principles." He would order them some good hot coffee. While he was speaking, the ship had fallen off the wind, and she took a heavy weather roll. A tremendous sea broke on board over the main rigging. It carried all hands, captain and all, in a heap down to leeward, and dashed them against the bulwarks. And a fortunate thing it was that it did not wash any of them overboard.

After some minutes of shaking, stamping, and not a little swearing—for Jack swears a good deal sometimes as a safety-valve, but means no harm by it—the conference was reopened. David Evans, seeing no chance of the grog—for Roberts, as we had learnt, was a temperance captain—asked for something else that was not grog: ham and fresh butter. The request was so absurd that I burst out laughing: but, to my intense astonishment, it was granted without a dissenting word. Was the skipper taking up the notion that the hams and other good stores on board would never be of use, save to dead men? But he must have known that the one sole chance for our lives was to keep the pumps going: and men cannot work day and night unless they are fed.

All hands turned to at the pumps, and the steward made ready a hearty meal. Ham, cheese, fresh butter, and a saucepanful of good strong coffee. It did the men good, poor fellows: who quitted it to man the pumps again.

This continued. A temping meal every two hours, and the work at the pumps perpetually. It was the alternate routine throughout that day. The wind did not moderate. On the contrary, the sea was, if anything, heavier; the squalls were most furious; and the ship laboured fearfully. At four o'clock the carpenter sounded the well, and said the water was slowly gaining on the pumps. The announcement struck a sudden dismay on all who heard it.

"Now, boys," said I, by way of encouragement, "this won't do. Let us give her a proper, good doing for an hour, and see if we can't make the sounding rod tell another tale." The men responded cheerfully to the appeal. The bell ropes were manned. One of them struck up a sea song with a loud chorus. The others joined in heartily and worked with a will. The fly-wheels spun round with a vengeance.

But when the well was next sounded, it was found that the water had gained on the ship. She was doomed—if we kept on our course. The men, disheartened, held a conference amongst themselves. Their lives were dear to them, their families at home were dear to them, and they resolved to see the captain. One chance remained for us—the putting back; and they would ask him to risk it.

I happened to be standing by the cabin door, when a lot of them came up, David Evans spokesman.

"Mr. W., we want to speak to the captain, if you please, sir."

I turned into the cabin and reported to the skipper. He went out, audibly wondering what they could want now. David Evans respectfully addressed him.

"Captain Roberts," said he, "we think you must see how it is with the ship. She's an old broken hull that can never last the voyage out. But for this gale, we might perhaps have got her to the Cape : but she'd never have lived through the storms off there. We have come to ask you, sir, to put her back. You see, sir, we are all tired out, and the water's gaining on us. There is no sign of any change ; in twenty-four hours all hands will be knocked up, and down we must go. Will you please put the ship before the wind, sir, and run her back ?"

The skipper was taken flat aback at the request, and flew into a passion. "Put back !" he roared out. "Have you all gone mad ? You'd better say at once that you want to take charge of the ship. But I'll let you know who's master here. Run her ! Never. Mr. W., start the pumps going immediately. The first man of you that says another word, I'll put him in irons !"

Not a man of them moved. David Evans began again, gently enough.

"Deed, sir, there's no need for you to get into such a way. No one speaks of taking charge. We have come aft and spoke to you in a civil and quiet manner. Some of us has been to sea so long as you, and knows just as much about a ship as you do, sir. Well, now, Captain Roberts, we've asked you, respectfully, to do the only thing that can save us. You won't do it. *I'll pump no more : and there's not a man among us will either.* 'Tis better to let her go down quietly. We'll stand a chance, perhaps, then, for our lives when the time comes. If we go on pumping till she's ready to sink, we will be so knocked up not one of us will be able to do anything for himself. So, now, sir, you can do as you like. Your life is as much consequence to you as mine is to me. If you keep her here she will sink before midnight, and you'll have to take your chance with the rest. *But, pump we won't.* And now you can put me in irons—that is, you can *try* it. 'Twill be a bad time the man will have of it who does try."

There was that in the look and in the quiet, determined tone of the man that made the skipper look twice before he answered. The men were evidently determined to stand by one another. How could he act against such odds ? He could not iron them all—or what would become of the pumps ? Besides, his life perhaps *was* of value to him ; and it was impossible that he had failed to discover the kind of ship in which he had been sent to sea. As a sailor, Roberts was no fool : and, when not in a passion, he had his share of common sense. His mind was already made up what to do, but it is customary in such cases to make a show of consulting with the officers. Asking us to walk into his cabin, he called the carpenter.

"Carpenter," he said, coldly and sternly, "what is your opinion of the state of the ship? Speak out just what you think."

"Well, sir, if you don't keep her away at once, I fear it may be too late soon."

"Mr. Sterner, you heard what the men said, and you know the state of things. What do you say to it all?"

"If you ask for my candid opinion, Captain Roberts, I must say I consider that it ought to have been done twenty-four hours ago. I thought of suggesting it to you, but did not like to do so. You might have thought I wished to interfere where I should not."

"Mr. W.?"

"I say keep her away, sir. Another day or two like the last, and I, for one, should be quite knocked up. The men have worked splendidly, but they are not steam-engines."

"Very well, then. Let it be done at once."

We went on deck. The skipper took a long, anxious look to windward, mentally measuring the size and height of the waves. "Clear away the foretopmast staysail," he sang out.

Watching for a smooth chance, he gave the order to hoist away. The sail quickly set. The helm was put up, and the lee main braced, checked a foot or two, just to "ease" the wind out of the topsail.

It was an anxious moment. The manœuvre was one of considerable danger. As the ship got the sea abeam, a tremendous wave was seen curling up—roaring and dashing towards us. "Hold on, for your lives, men," shouted the skipper. And it was a miracle that we were not all engulfed then and there. The decks were filled up chock full, level with the rails. The ship quivered from stem to stern, and felt as if she were settling down. Fortunately, a good portion of the bulwarks had been washed away, and the water found its way quickly off the deck. The ship now paid off rapidly. In five minutes we were going along "dead before it." The force of the wind was felt much less than when we were head to it. The sea, however, was very heavy. One huge wave came roaring up astern, looking like a mountain. The ship had not got way enough on, and it "pooped" her. The shock was terrific. I fully expected we were gone *this* time. It did, however, no damage beyond sweeping the decks, and carrying everything movable on them forward in a heap. This was the last sea we shipped. The foresail had been loosed, the sheets were hauled aft, and the ship moved faster through the water. Soon the whole topsails were set. We carried double topsails—the finest and handiest thing ever invented for a ship. All of us were soaking wet, and the weather was bitterly cold. But there was no rest or respite from work. "Pump ship!" was again the cry. And we pumped all night long; only ceasing occasionally for a quarter of an hour to get a feed and some hot coffee. Round went the pumps,

click-clanging at every revolution of the fly-wheel. Those pumps were our sole chance for life.

Towards morning the wind moderated, and before noon we had the maintop-gallant sail set. The sea too was much less heavy. But the leaking continued. The pumps were scarcely left. We had "watch and watch" again after this, but were obliged to keep pumping all the time when not trimming or making sail.

On the fourth morning we took a pilot on board off Point Lynas. A fair wind carried us up, and that night we dropped anchor in the river off Liverpool, just by the dock we had left a fortnight before.

We had, indeed, had a most marvellous and providential escape from death. *Humanly* speaking, nothing but the splendid new pumps kept the ship afloat. And these were fitted more by good luck than anything else. The old ones were condemned, and none too soon, when the ship was preparing to take in cargo. The pump maker inquired personally of Mr. Buckle in our presence—that is, mine and Sterner's—whether he should supply the best pumps. Of course, replied liberal Mr. Buckle. And the man did it.

But the pumps would have been of no use after a time, but for the splendid set of men we had. All were good, hardworking, *able seamen*. A term more misused nowadays than any other I know of.

The return of the *Asia* into port caused no small commotion. Those who were interested came flocking down to look at her, and at us escaped sailors. Prim was there, watching us haul in.

But startling tidings awaited us: and the complacent faces which had watched us away were changed to gloom now. Prim came on board, looking as black as midnight.

"You see we are back alive, Prim," I said. "Had a hard fight for it, though."

"Worse luck," retorted Prim.

"Worse luck! What do you mean?"

"Been a deuced sight better if the broken old hulk had gone down, body and bones," he growled. "Might have stood a chance of getting our money back out of the insurance then."

The owner of the *Asia*, Mr. Buckle, had been declared bankrupt. Sterner and I could not have received the news with more incredulity had we been told that we had been declared it. That great and rich man, Buckle!—who was the owner of the new line of ships about to be launched, and meant to have made the fortune of us all!

It was even so. The great Mr. Buckle was a bankrupt. And as he had paid the people in promissory notes, and the notes were worthless—for the estate would not realize a shilling in the pound, there being in fact no estate to realize upon—no wonder the faces were long. We had looked upon him at Liverpool as a second Rothschild.

And what of Captain English? How was he? Captain English

had recovered as speedily as he was taken, we were told. The very day we had sailed out of port, he was himself again, and went up to London. Dr. Sims considered it the most extraordinary case ever brought under his notice, and meant to send it to the *Lancet*.

I went up to the Mitre: and there heard worse whispers. The rich, kind, gentlemanly Mr. Buckle was called a scoundrel and a swindler; and it was Mrs. Prim who called him so to me, shut up with her in the bar parlour. And she confessed that she could not make out Captain English—that is, his illness—but of course it did not do to say so. When he was informed, upon his recovery, that the *Asia* had gone out of port but two hours before, he nearly wept with vexation at not having sailed in her, and at having been superseded in the command.

Mrs. Prim was naturally as sore as her husband upon the score of the bankruptcy, and disclosed to me what she knew. No doubt it was a relief to her to do it. Upon the first intimation of it reaching Prim, she said, he had taken the next train to London, fully persuaded that the news could not be true. He reached London at night, and the next morning went to find out Mr. Buckle's offices—the address of which he had fortunately pencilled down in an odd corner of his pocket-book—and found them in a dingy court off Lime Street. It was a shabby-looking place, and he went wondering up the shaky and dirty stairs, and reached the second-floor. Yes: there were two doors bearing the name, "Mr. P. Buckle:" on one was written "Private," on the other "Clerks' Office." Prim knocked at the latter, and was told, in a shrill, piping, treble voice, to come in.

The room was as shabby as the stairs: nothing in but an old desk, and a chair or two, and a sharp-looking boy of fourteen or fifteen years, the owner of the thin voice. Prim took it all in at a glance. He concluded he must have got the address, by some extraordinary mistake, of another Mr. Buckle. *This* could not be the "offices" in London which that gentleman and Captain English had often spoken of with as much respect as though they had been built of gold.

"Is this Mr. Buckle's office?"

"Yes, sir."

Prim hardly knew how to put it. "I mean Mr. Buckle the shipowner. His ship, the *Asia*, has just sailed from Liverpool."

"All right," said the sharp boy.

"Is Mr. Buckle in?"

"No, sir. Gone in the country on business."

This was a check. "When do you expect him back?"

"Don't know at all. He may be away some days, or longer."

"What part of the country is he gone to?"

"Can't tell for sure. Cornwall, or somewhere."

"Can I see the head clerk—or manager?"

"There is no head clerk—except me."

"*You!*" cried Richard Prim. "But you are not the only clerk?"

"Yes, I am, sir."

Of all astounding revelations! Prim began to feel utterly bewildered.

"Is there *nobody* I can make inquiries of? I've come all the way from Liverpool on purpose."

"Don't know of anybody, sir," replied the boy.

"Do you chance to know where I can find Captain English?—who was to have gone out in command of the *Asia*?"

"Don't know anything about him. Captain English?—Let's see. Think I've heard his name. Think he's gone round to some port to take another command. Am not sure, sir, that that was the name."

And nothing more satisfactory could Prim get at. He next went to the liquidators who had Mr. Buckle's affairs in hand, and heard there would not be a shilling in the pound. Prim stood aghast.

"Captain English told me Mr. Buckle was a rich man," said he.

"Captain English should have known better," was the dry answer.

"But Mr. Buckle seemed to be so very prosperous—talked as though he was!"

"Ay: thought himself so, perhaps. When a man's speculations fail, he suddenly finds himself nowhere."

And so Richard Prim found he had had his journey for nothing, and went back home as he came.

Well, the long and the short of it is, that the *Asia* was a worthless old ship, tinkered up for her voyage; and that our lives, when we sailed in her, were not worth a month's purchase. But for that gale—which Heaven must have sent to save us—we should have been too far away from land to put back; and the leaking and heavily-laden ship would probably never have reached the Cape. Nothing of this was proved; nobody made any stir in the affair, and it died away without public exposure—but I affirm that it is true.

One person, interested in some of us who had sailed in the sinking ship, made it his business to institute inquiry privately. By dint of perseverance, he at length obtained an insight into the truth.

Mr. Buckle was a gentleman who for many years had contrived to keep his head above water in some mysterious way and to hold offices in the City. His business seemed to lie in "mines," and in the promotion of schemes. At length he hit upon a grand one: safe to make his fortune and that of all connected with it, especially his intimate friend Captain English. Perhaps the captain had a hand in the promotion. I don't say so. Mr. Buckle would become a shipowner. And this is how he set about it.

In our large seaports there is always a number of old and more or less worn-out ships. They are unseaworthy. No really respectable owner would send them to sea. They are laid up in some unfrequented corner of a dock, generally called "*Rotten Row*"—the name is

suggestive—awaiting a purchaser. Usually they are sold to be broken up. The proprietors are glad to let them go for what they'll fetch.

Mr. Buckle put himself in communication with various shipbrokers in and out of London. He soon had a goodly list of such ships for sale, with a description of each; and he proceeded to one of our chief outports to inspect the *Asia*, a large 1200 ton ship. She was inspected for him by a professional surveyor—fee two guineas. The result was that Mr. Buckle bought her cheaply, paid in bills at three and six months, and conveyed her round to Liverpool.

After running to and fro across the Atlantic for many years the *Asia* had been condemned. On her last passage from New York she encountered a succession of severe gales with very heavy seas. She was deeply laden, got strained all to pieces, and arrived at her destination leaking like a sieve. She was surveyed privately after discharging cargo, and unconditionally *condemned as worn out*.

The owners were Americans. On receipt of the news, they instructed their agent in England to dispose of her to the best advantage. She had been laid up eight months when Mr. Buckle heard of her. His was the first bid made, and the people were glad to come to terms. They had to take his bills in payment; but, on the other hand, they obtained a good price for the old hulk—*five hundred pounds*.

The purchase completed, Mr. Buckle, through the influence of a friend at court, chartered the ship to the Europe and India Steamship Company, to take out patent fuel to India—and at a high rate of charter. He was to receive two thousand five hundred pounds on account of freight *as soon as the ship sailed*. The next step was to insure the ship and the balance of the freight, due after delivery of the cargo abroad. None of the large public companies would be likely to have anything to do with such a ship. In the first place, she could not possibly pass their survey. A private concern was found to take the risk. On the policy of insurance Mr. Buckle then borrowed one thousand pounds. He next mortgaged the ship for fifteen hundred more.

Thus it will be seen that by the time the ship left Liverpool he had raised five thousand pounds in cash upon her and her prospective earnings. On the other hand, he had not expended a twentieth part of this sum. Even the purchase money was not payable until later.

It was a shameful swindle. The hearer of the facts sat aghast. "Oh, sir," said the relater, carelessly, "such things are done every day. And it is not one time in fifty that you can touch the owner."

"And what of the officers and men who sail in them?"

"Ah, poor fellows, it's unlucky for them! Many more brave officers and men, than the world knows of, forfeit their lives by being taken to sea in these rotten ships. We call them floating coffins."

THE IMPERIAL VIOLET.

THERE are certain plants and flowers bearing an historical importance and interest, which have, on this account, gathered round themselves a store of anecdote and legend of a nature quite different from that which attaches to the majority of their race. Such, for example, is the broom, that *planta genista* which Geoffry of Anjou took as his crest, and which gave its name to a line of English kings; and the oak, which is still worn on the twenty-ninth of May, in memory of the Restoration. The Rose of England, the Shamrock of Ireland, the Thistle of Scotland, the Lilies of France, and the Oak-leaf of Austria, are sufficiently familiar; and there are other flower-badges of various countries which are almost as well established, although perhaps less generally known: as the Palmetto of Carolina, the Lotos of India, &c.

But for the most recent examples of the extensive adoption by a political party of a floral emblem, we must cross the Channel; and we shall find that not only has the Bourbon lily acquired a new prominence and popularity, but that the Republicans have adopted the fragrant wild thyme as their flower-badge, while the Imperialists have appropriated the violet. This selection was made by the first Napoleon, and zealously maintained by the adherents of his party.

At first sight it would appear that the imperious ruler of the destinies of Europe could hardly have chosen as an emblem a less suitable flower; for there seems to be but little in common between the despotic monarch and the blossom which has come to be regarded as a fitting emblem of humility. But it was at a period when reverses had come upon Napoleon that the violet was selected as his emblem. It was on leaving France for Elba that he said, "I shall return with the violets:" and this little sentence—a mere *façon de parler*, as it would seem—was sufficient for his friends and sympathizers. Violet ribbons and violet rings were worn publicly by the Bonapartists as a party distinction: while Napoleon himself was spoken of and toasted as *Caporal*, or *Papa la Violette*. "Aimez-vous la violette?" was the question by which a sympathizer might be known. A simple reply in the affirmative indicated that the responder was ignorant of the schemes for the restoration; while the answer, "Eh bien! elle reviendra au printemps," was the sign of a confederate. A favourite picture represented a small group of violets so arranged that in their outlines the profiles of Napoleon, Marie Louise, and the King of Rome could be traced by the initiated; or the profile of Napoleon alone was exhibited, with the

motto, "Il reviendra au printemps." Byron, in his poem, "Napoleon's Farewell to France," has the following allusion to the violet :

"Farewell to thee, France !—but when liberty rallies,
Once more in thy regions, remember me then ;
The violet still grows in the depths of thy valleys,
Though withered, thy tears will unfold it again."

Such being the significance attached to this little flower, we may imagine how it increased in favour when Napoleon, having escaped from Elba, entered the Tuileries, on the twentieth of March, 1815, when the violets had indeed returned, and were worn on all sides by his rejoicing friends. Naturally enough, the violet thenceforth continued the Napoleonic flower ; and during the Bourbon ascendancy it was dangerous to wear one in public, its old significance remaining in full force. When Bonaparte was finally conveyed to St. Helena, we are told that he gave a violet to an English naval officer who accompanied him—an intimation, it may be, of his hope (which was never realized) of a speedy return.

The revival, in greater force than ever, in connection with the late Emperor—as manifested at his funeral, and at the mausoleum at Chiselhurst, which is sometimes almost hidden by violets—is, no doubt, chiefly due to tradition. Its popularity, however, was probably enhanced by an incident which happened at the time of the late Emperor's escape from the fortress of Ham. A packet of violet plants having arrived by diligence, the keeper was directed by Dr. Conneau to plant them in pots, and, while his attention was thus occupied, the escape was effected. It is stated that the annual sale of violets in Paris exceeds 6,000,000 bunches, realising a sum of more than 577,000 francs.

As an emblem of constancy, the violet was esteemed in France from very early days, and this signification may, perhaps, have had something to do with its adoption by the expectant Bonapartists. It was the prize bestowed upon the troubadour in olden times, and was subsequently replaced by its representative in gold. A golden violet was the prize instituted by Clémence Isaure, at the floral games established at Toulouse, early in the fourteenth century, which have been kept up, with occasional interruptions, to the present day. Yet further back, Athens was noted for its love of violets ; and the term, "Violet-crowned Athens," occurs more than once in classical authors. "In all seasons," says a modern author, "it was to be seen exposed for sale in the market-place at Athens, the citizens being successful in rearing it in their gardens even when the ground was covered with snow." The violet is not mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, but its odour is spoken of in the Koran as "excellent above all other odours : it is as warmth in winter, and coolness in midsummer."

Although always a favourite flower in England, there is very little in

the way of popular tradition connected with the violet. In some districts it is considered "unlucky" to bring two or three into the house at a time, it being supposed that the brood of chickens will be proportionately limited: a good handful must be taken in. Wilsford, in his "Nature's Secrets," published in 1665, says, "When violets flourish in autumn, it is an evil sign of an ensuing plague the year following, or some pestiferous disease." It would appear from Tennyson's line—

"Thick by ashen roots the violets grow"—

that it is supposed to flourish especially under the shadow of the ash, but this is doubtful. In Thuringia it is regarded as a protection against witchcraft; and in Silesia ague may be cured by chewing the first violet seen.

An American violet was mainly instrumental in causing John Bartram, an old Quaker botanist, of Pennsylvania, to take up the study of plants. Gathering it one day at random, he was so struck with its beauty that he resolved to learn more about its structure. He, therefore, studied Latin, until he had acquired sufficient for understanding botanical descriptions, and became one of the most eminent of the early American botanists.

JAMES BRITTEN.



LOST IN IMAGINATION.

I SIT me down in my quiet room,
The last of a household band;
The wild rose sheds a sweet perfume,
And the bats flit past in the gathering gloom
Like gnomes from another land.

Now sweetly falls on the list'ning ear
The ring of the evening bell;
Like music heard from some distant sphere,
Now almost hushed, now sounding clear,
In full harmonic swell.

The stars come forth from their homes above,
A bright and beautiful throng,
And gaze on me with their looks of love,
With power my inmost heart to move
With feelings deep and strong.

And I no longer am sitting there
The last of a household band;
But circled by loved ones, that round my chair
Press close and closer their forms of air,
As they throng from the spirit-land.

DR. SEYMOUR.

BY NARISSA ROSAVO, AUTHOR OF "POLLY."

DOCTOR SEYMOUR stood outside the post-office in the city of Bradford, and dropped a large square-shaped envelope into the letter-box. His hand trembled a little as he did so; and no wonder, for he had just posted a proposal of marriage to Miss Ellen Pemberton. He was a man of quick sympathies, and of almost too deep and ardent sensibility. Medicine is a wearing profession to such a temperament, and he looked older than his years. Dr. Seymour was not, however, very young. He was the last man in the world of whom any acquaintance would have prophesied that he would probably propose by letter, if he felt matrimonially inclined, in place of urging his cause by that eager persuasive speech of which he was master, or aiding it by the lever of his personal influence, which was strong with nearly all who knew him: for he was a universal favourite. But then, who ever does what is expected of him? He was a very modest man as regards self-estimation. And, perhaps, after all, he was swayed in this, as in most other matters, by his kind heart, which could ache a little even for the embarrassment of a child.

Dr. Seymour's patients received a somewhat divided attention that evening, as he afterwards confessed. Nevertheless, he conscientiously visited everyone who had the least right to expect him on this occasion; and, in consequence, returned home late and weary, and quite ready for his dinner, which had long been in readiness. But fresh work was awaiting him. Had it been possible for the lady to whom he had despatched his letter to have been forgotten, even for one instant, she would at once have been recalled to mind by the anxious face of a respectable elderly man who was on the look out for him at his house, and who eagerly welcomed his return.

"Miss Ellen thinks she's dying sir, I hope you'll come away, and no time lost. She were seized very bad, sudden like, this afternoon."

The Doctor passed his hand across his forehead. "The young lady?" he gasped, inquiringly.

"Our young lady, sir," the man replied, a little tartly.

"But which of them?"

"Miss Ellen, sir, of course. The one my wife and I has known all her life. *We* calls the other Miss Nellie."

The Doctor swallowed a little hot soup hastily, as an act of special favour to his housekeeper, while a fresh horse was being harnessed,

and then hurried away with the messenger. The distance the two had to go was not far. They soon reached a pretty suburban house, standing in its own grounds. A neat lodge kept guard inside the gate. This was the abode of Haynes, the man who had summoned the Doctor. He was steward, gardener, and care-taker in general of the little place; and also, as he considered, of its owners and mistresses. These were two maiden ladies—an aunt and niece. Although there was more than a dozen years between them, they might easily have passed for sisters, had it not been that their names were identically the same. Both were simply Ellen Pemberton; no more and no less: to their great mutual indignation. On either side sundry hints and recommendations were continually being thrown out that the other should adopt the title of Nell, or Nellie, which had been unconditionally forced upon the younger of the pair by the lodge-keeper, but neither would yield the point, being specially disinclined to the abbreviation.

"I was christened Ellen, and Ellen I will remain until you bury me; but you may call me Ellie, if you like," the elder lady had said, with a twinkle of fun in her eyes, the very morning of the day on which this story opens. She still wanted some years of being forty, but she was quite plump and fair enough for that age. A downright pretty woman, with a face for ever brimming over with laughter and mischief. She could boast far more regular attractions than her niece, who was yet a dreamy, sweet, soft little thing of beauty, with a graceful, well-shaped head and small white hands.

"My hair certainly is a little thin," continued Miss Ellen Pemberton, "but I really don't think those six grey intruders show much. I don't care about pulling them out. It seems mean. What is your opinion—Nellie?" The speaker was standing on tiptoe before the chimney-glass.

"It shall be Nellie, if I may call you Aunt Ellen. Now, that is a fair bargain. Shall it be so? Otherwise I will never give in. I like Ellie best too."

The originator of this last rather malicious little speech was caressing a silky cat while she spoke. Pussy was enthroned on her shoulder. The two were inseparables within doors, and were rarely seen apart. The elder lady made a wry face at her niece.

"Can't you call me grandmother at once, you cross old thing?"

And then the two sat down to breakfast, with Pussy sitting by to help. Before the meal was half over, a bachelor cousin dropped in. He was a familiar attaché to the house, and the escort of the ladies whenever they needed his services in that capacity. The proposal of marriage, now on its way to the abode, had been hurried on by a sudden burst of jealousy awakened in the breast of Dr. Seymour by his having, on several late occasions, met the three together about town in very merry and confidential intercourse. Cousin Jim was in a very unusually

self-absorbed mood this morning, however. He was so pre-occupied with his own thoughts that he actually kissed his two relatives without leave, an honour only accorded him, as a rule, once a year; and then under protest, and with a view to accidents, as the elder lady remarked; invariably before his annual purchase of that long white cane called an alpenstock, which so many persons find rather an encumbrance than an aid to them in touring about Switzerland. Having got through with his salutations, Jim sat down and twirled his soft hat between his fingers, and meditated. "When do you start?" inquired his eldest cousin.

"I—eh!—start—where? Oh, I'm not going to any place, just for a while at least."

"Then what right had you to kiss us, pray?"

"Kiss you! I?—what! did I though? Well, I suppose a fellow might do worse with his time. I daresay there are chaps who would envy me the privilege."

"But you haven't the privilege, sir," cried one.

"And he never even knew he had done it!" exclaimed the other.

"I declare I should not be surprised to hear you had matrimony in your mind," the elder lady continued, sagaciously.

"Women are always thinking of that, so they put it down upon the wiser sex that they do the same," Jim said, absently, but he blushed in a most unbecoming manner. He began some other speech, but his thoughts appeared to be too mighty for him. He rose, offered two more salutes, which were declined with dignity, made his bow, and departed.

"If I did not *know* we were both cut out for a pair of old maids, I should say Jim Compton wanted to marry one of us," Miss Pemberton said, as the door closed upon him.

"I don't think it would be of much use for him to wish for either of us," her niece replied composedly, emptying the cream ewer into a saucer for Pussy.

It was on the afternoon of this same day that the elder of the two ladies was attacked by sudden and serious illness.

Doctor Seymour found the house upset by alarm and great anxiety. Miss Nellie, as the gatekeeper called her, was sobbing as if her heart would break with grief for her aunt's sufferings, and from angry provocation at being shut completely out of the sick-room by Miss Pemberton's maid, who assumed as much authority within doors as the man-servant did without. The Doctor came away from his patient with a very serious face. Ellen was lying in wait for him. He was a very old friend. He told her he was very uneasy about her aunt. If she were not better in the morning, he should bring a second physician. His listener's tears fell faster than ever. They went to his heart as much as if they had been caused by some ache he could remedy. He

longed to linger and try to stop their course, but he was forced by stern necessity to hasten back to town, in order to send the needed remedies. Haynes went with him.

There was more than medicine upon the Doctor's mind that night. He was deeply provoked with himself for having sent his proposal of marriage to-day. He felt fully persuaded that his suit was now certain of rejection, as it would arrive at so untoward a time. He was tired out and hungry, and much depressed altogether. "What sort of a life has a man in my position to offer any woman? I feel too, now, that I have never even prepared my way here. And I have the ill-luck and presumption to step forward, unexpectedly, at such a hopelessly unsuitable time. I throw away every chance by this abruptness."

This was his train of thought as he drove back to town.

"Haynes, do you know my handwriting well?" he inquired, suddenly, letting the reins fall on his horse's neck as he spoke.

The man thus appealed to gave a rather indignant little snort. "In course I do, sir," he replied, quickly.

"I am in a great difficulty," the Doctor went on. "I this evening posted a letter on business to your ladies' house. It was directed to Miss—Ellen Pemberton. Now, with all this sickness and anxiety there, I would give much to recall it for a few days. Could you help me in the matter, and can I trust you to keep the thing close?"

Haynes considered for some moments before he answered. "I doesn't much like keeping back or meddling with none of their things," he said, slowly; "but—well, sure, if a man has a right to anything, 'tis to his own letter. 'Tis hard if he mightn't have it, and no doubt 'twould be a bad job to bother Miss Ellen with business now. You has done many a good turn for me an' my wife, sir; I'll do this for you. All the letters for the house go into the box at the gate, and I unlocks it, and takes 'em up. 'Tis easy enough done anyways."

"My note is in a large white square envelope."

"All right! You shall have it, sir."

The Doctor gratefully received and pocketed his missive next morning at the gate, when he threw the reins to Haynes. He rarely took his horse and trap to the house here. Merry voices reached his ears from the sick-room as he ascended the stairs. "Is it a resurrection?" he inquired, with a smile of surprise, as he passed the threshold of the chamber. It really seemed to be something of the sort. Either he had overrated the seriousness of last night's symptoms, or Miss Pemberton had made a most marvellous stride towards recovery. A good sleep had done wonders for her. The two ladies had their heads together over some letter, and were in eager consultation concerning it. The Doctor almost wished it had been his now.

"I begin to think it was all a false alarm, Dr. Seymour," his patient said, jestingly. "I feel nearly myself again. At any rate, you need

not order the hatbands just yet. It is really a case of Mother Hubbard and her pet. 'She went to the joiner to get him a coffin, but when she came back, why, the dog was a-laughing'!"

Miss Pemberton had taken out a new lease of fun as well as of life.

Her niece slipped out of the room when the Doctor came in, her face rosy with blushes. She went downstairs to await his descent, but to her great discomfiture she found that Cousin Jim had just arrived, and was full of anxious inquiries concerning the invalid's condition. He only stayed, however, until Dr. Seymour made his appearance; but when the latter recognized who it was that Ellen had just bidden farewell to, his spirits sank to zero. He scarcely lingered for a moment before he too took his departure. Ellen's face was crimson now. Even her little white ears were blushing. She could hardly find voice to put a timid question or two about her aunt. The Doctor answered with something like impatient abruptness, and turned away after a cold and most commonplace leave-taking.

There was a look of wounded pride in the girl's face as he thus left her. She bent forward her graceful head, and gazed after his retreating figure with a glance of mingled amazement and grief. Hot tears filled and dimmed her soft eyes, and she pressed her hand hastily to her heart. Something nestled there underneath her dress. Pussy came to her, purring and clawing, but she set her down very decidedly upon the rug, and went away to her own room.

The Doctor, on his part, hurried home as soon as he could. The letter he had received back burned his pocket. Nevertheless, he felt very thankful that it was in his own possession, rather than in another's. He drew it forth angrily, when he was safe within his private room, and, without so much as bestowing a glance upon it, he pushed the offending envelope behind a little miniature upon his chimney-piece. If a fire had been burning upon the hearth at the moment, it would soon have been consumed within its flames. He had promised Miss Pemberton that he would call in again that evening to see her, as he would be passing by her gate. He was sorry now for having thus pledged himself. She was better, and there was no real necessity for his doing so.

Now that Miss Pemberton was in a convalescent condition, her maid no longer forbade those whom she called "outsiders" to visit her mistress's room. Indeed, on the following day, she even requested Nellie to sit with her lady during the servants' dinner hour. The invalid was asleep, really at first, fictitiously later. Her niece had a book in her hand, but a voice from the bed suddenly exclaimed, in kind persuasive tones, "Nellie, my dear, why are you crying?"

"I am not crying," was the very hasty reply made to the appeal. Only a single tear had fallen, so the speaker felt herself righteously justified in her assertion.

"Oh! Then the slater should come and mend the house; the rain must be coming through the roof, and right down."

"You *know* it is a fine day, with a lovely sun shining," the tormented girl said, bursting into a little odd, choked laugh, but a small shower of drops fell now upon her dress.

"I am glad to hear it; I want to get up presently. But what *is* the matter, Nellie? Has Jim been kissing you again without leave?"

"I may as well tell you now, Ellen. I have been wanting to do so all along. I must have your opinion and advice."

"Tell away, my dear. I do love giving advice when the receiver doesn't want me to take any." Miss Pemberton sat up. She was quite hot and eager for a little excitement.

"I got this letter by the post yesterday," her niece said, tearfully.

"See, isn't it quite plain and clear? and yet—and yet—he has been here three times since, but avoids me. He never looks at me, I think. He doesn't seem in the least to want or expect any answer."

Miss Pemberton read the letter through, and examined it carefully.

"Have you answered it?" she asked at last.

"I would sooner die than do so now?" was the hot reply.

The two consulted long and anxiously upon this very mysterious matter. The result of their confidences was not enlivening. "I'm sure, my dear, it would be a fair mercy if either of us broke the spell and went in for marriage. We are such determined old maids. I don't know what will become of us, unless one sets the other a good example soon. Nevertheless, I must now tell you my mind plainly. It is my firm belief that the Doctor never wrote this letter. You may be sure the whole thing is a hoax of Cousin Jim's. I told you he was up to some kind of mischief the other day. I saw him observing the Doctor and you that last day the two dined here together."

"But the handwriting?"

"Pshaw! That goes for nothing. A man with no great brains for anything in particular can nearly invariably do just whatever he likes with his hands. Jim always was great at letter-writing, since the first day I knew him, and that is a long time ago. No doubt he can copy anyone else's hand just as well as Dr. Seymour's. Besides, for the matter of that, writing is by no means such a very decisive affair as some people think. I could almost as well as not swear in a court that this envelope had been directed, for instance, by—Ah! well, it is of no use bringing up old stories. I have had my day, I suppose. What a fool one is, to be sure, when one is a girl like you! Not that I am so very ancient now, of course, but still—after all, it was very nice to have had so much in one's hand, even though it was all thrown away. Heigh-ho! Certainly the writing is curiously like. That makes me all the more sure Jim is at the bottom of the business. Geoffrey was his cousin, although he was no relation of mine. The same blood

is in their veins. Do look, Ellen, and see whether this attack has brought any more grey hairs."

"Oh, no!" Ellen replied, absently, after a very cursory examination into this interesting subject. There was a little less depression to be observed now in her tones, but her face was flushed and indignant. "And what are we to do to punish this abominable Jim?" she asked.

"Cut him, of course," was the prompt reply. "When next he calls, bid Mary say we are not at home to him; and tell the servants to manage so that while the door is open he may be sure to overhear one of them saying something which will let him perfectly understand that we are all the time within, and disengaged."

The result of these very active proceedings came, in a couple of days, in the form of a letter addressed to "The Misses Pemberton." It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR COUSINS,—I cannot conceive how you have discovered my secret. I thought it was entirely in my own keeping, so far as you were concerned, to be divulged at my leisure and pleasure. I would not have kept it from you much longer. Needless tantalisation is not my forte, neither was it ever my desire to excite false expectations and hopes. I am very sorry that I should have misled either of my fair relatives concerning my intentions. I always endeavoured so to divide my attentions impartially between the two that neither could believe I thought seriously of her. It is very unfortunate that I have not been successful in this, especially as my affections have long been otherwise engaged. By-and-by, when the first sharpness of this disappointment shall, in a measure, have passed away, I trust we may once more meet as friends, and re-establish our old intimacy on terms suitable to our altered circumstances. Till then, I remain,

"Your affectionate cousin,

"JAMES COMPTON."

The two Ellens read this with their heads together. The elder lady almost laughed herself into a fresh attack of illness. She was fairly convulsed with merriment, leaving most of the indignation proper to the occasion to be transacted by her niece. "Surely he has revenged himself on us," she exclaimed, at last. "But what on earth does he mean by his affections being elsewhere engaged, and so forth? Oh, Jim! you will be the death of me! Ellen, the mystery thickens. I don't now believe he ever wrote that forgery, if it is one. Has the Doctor spoken since? No! Well, here goes for another move in the game! You and I must answer this precious epistle of Jim's. See, this will do, I think. 'The Misses Pemberton present their compliments to Mr. Compton. They denied themselves to him on the occasion of his last visit, in consequence of their then existing belief that he had been the

author of a vulgar practical joke played off upon the house. If he is innocent of this, and can prove that his "secret" had no reference to the before-mentioned trick, the Misses Pemberton will be happy to renew their acquaintance with Mr. Compton!"

This note was in due course despatched by post.

Next evening Dr. Seymour came to see his patient, who was now almost out of his hands. Miss Pemberton was sitting by the fire downstairs. Her niece did not make her appearance at all upon this occasion. Dr. Seymour was much depressed. He held his companion's hand long in his, and looked anxiously into her face. She coloured violently, and turned her eyes away.

"Don't you think I am very nearly well again now?" she asked, somewhat abruptly.

"I do. I will come next week and see how you get on. After that, I don't expect you will need me."

He sighed heavily. His questioner felt embarrassed, and was glad when the interview came to an end.

The other Ellen was in her own room. She stood at the window, and watched until she saw the visitor leave the house, and then, after some little time, she went downstairs. Pussy was purring in a comforting manner in her arms. Miss Pemberton was sitting in a lounge near the fire. Her niece took possession of a low rocking-chair, and swayed herself gently to and fro. Presently, the elder lady broke into a little laugh, but it was a nervous and uncomfortable kind of affair. "Have you that letter by you still, Ellen?" she inquired.

Her companion nodded.

"Would you mind letting me look at it again?"

"Oh, not in the least. The whole world may see it so far as I am concerned. I don't care if you nail it up on the hall door. He might read it over then for himself, when he next calls. I think that would be a very good plan."

The feminine orator made her little speech with very unusual sharpness in her tones. Pussy did not understand or approve of this unpleasant excitability, and she attempted to escape, but her mistress closely imprisoned the would-be deserter, within her arms. "Ah, Pussy, please stay with me. Don't you go away too," she murmured, laying her cheek against the cat's soft fur; and Pussy stayed. The aunt looked on with an air of provocation. "Do give up petting that animal, child," she exclaimed, almost angrily. "It is no wonder you are going to be an old maid, when you never, by any chance, put her out of your arms. Have you forgotten that I asked you to lend me that letter again?"

Ellen drew the required article from her pocket. (It had been de-throned from its first resting-place.) She handed it over with studied carelessness of manner.

"Perhaps, after all, you ought to have written an answer to this," Miss Pemberton said, poking up the fire, and bending forward to catch the light of a sudden blaze; for the two were sitting in the gloaming.

Ellen looked up, hot and indignant. "He wants no reply," she returned. "He cares nothing for me now, and I—I—of course I don't want to have anything to do with him."

Her companion turned the letter over and over in her hands. There was an odd, embarrassed look again upon her face. "I have a thought which might possibly explain this mystery, only I don't like to tell it to you," she observed, hesitatingly.

"Say whatever you think," whispered her niece out of the depths of Pussy's consoling fur.

"Well—I—could it be possible that this extraordinary affair was after all really intended for me?"

"But the direction?" These three words came out with a gasp.

"Why, child, how often our letters get muddled together. You know they do. Nearly every advertisement, for instance, comes to you, and yet, no doubt, at least half of such things are intended for me. Then Haynes is often with the Doctor. He talks to him by the yard of old times, when my father and elder sister were alive, and before Geoffrey—I mean Colonel Clive—went away to India. He always speaks of me as Miss Ellen, and will persist in doing so. The Doctor may have had this in his mind. He may be wholly unaware of having put anything but Miss Pemberton on the envelope. I have noticed that he is in some ways an absent man. A person in love, too, would put the Christian name down almost unconsciously of the girl—bah! I mean of the woman he cares for."

"Ellen is my name too," sobbed the other occupant of the room, half piteously, half appealingly. "If—if it was you he meant, why has he never said one word to you about the letter in all these days when he has been here so often?"

"He—well, you see, dear, it seems as if the great goose fancied I had been very ill indeed. He may have avoided all discussion about the matter, lest excitement of any sort should prove injurious to my recovery. He will probably have the affair out next week, when he comes again, if things are at all as I have been surmising. To tell the truth, it was his manner this afternoon that put all this into my head."

"And do you care for him? Will you ——"

The elder lady cleared her throat, and then again poked the fire vigorously. "I ——"

A sudden loud summons at the hall door disturbed the conference. Miss Pemberton sat stiffly up in her chair and listened. Pussy leaped on the floor, and was not hindered in so doing. Her mistress fled away to her own room, hot and angry with herself and with all the world,

and yet unable to make her indignation quell a great pain which was aching at her heart.

Meanwhile, Mary, with a surprised face, ushered Doctor Seymour in to her mistress for the second time that day. She lit up the gas, and then left the two alone. The visitor was excited, and much flurried. "You will never forgive me," he said, breathlessly. "I can certainly never pardon myself for what I have done. Here is a letter which is, I suppose, intended for you. I have read it through, almost without knowing what I did. It has been lying in my room for several days past. Pray see if it is of importance to you before I explain.

Of importance! The first sentence made her gasp for breath, and look up at her companion with a wild, startled gaze.

"DEAREST ELLEN,—I have just returned home after my twelve long years of exile. I have learned that you are still unmarried, but that is all my informant can tell me of you. I am of the same mind as of old. May I come and see you again? Do not say yes, unless you can let things be once more upon their past happy footing between us. Let us meet as engaged, if we meet at all. I will wait here ten days for your answer: this will give you time for consideration. As ever,

"Yours,

"GEOFFREY CLIVE."

As Miss Pemberton read, tears streamed down her face, and at last she pressed the letter to her lips, heedless and forgetful of a bystander's presence.

"You should have got this long since," Doctor Seymour said, hesitatingly. His companion started as if awakening suddenly out of a dream. Her cheeks became carmine colour.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I thought I was alone. Ten days! and it is a full week now since this was written. I must go and answer this old friend's letter at once. I hope you will excuse me, Doctor Seymour." She stood up, trembling with excitement. As she did so, her companion's unfortunate epistle fell from her lap to the floor. He picked it up, and in so doing recognized it as that which had once been his property, but which had ceased so to be on leaving his possession, and which he certainly had had no right whatever to attempt to recall. He now stood silently with it in his hand, like a man in a maze. Miss Pemberton looked at him, and remembered all their mystification concerning this letter, and his subsequent behaviour. She saw there was something which needed telling, and she forced herself, by a strong effort of will, to put her own affairs aside for a while, and attend to the matter in hand. "That letter from you came some time back?" she remarked, in an inquiring tone. The Doctor looked at his companion with a distracted and anxious expression in his face.

"And what did she think of my presumption? What must she have thought of *me*, for avoiding her, as I have done, all this week, and for never looking or asking for an answer? But everything is in a confusion. I did not know this letter had reached her, and I fully believed she was either wholly or half engaged to her cousin."

"You never were more mistaken in your life," Miss Pemberton said, laughing heartily as she thought of Jim again.

By degrees the whole story came out. The Doctor had returned home at once on leaving the house in the afternoon. He had taken out and opened the letter Haynes had given him, intending to destroy it, and had thus discovered that a mistake had been made. As the gate-keeper afterwards confessed, he had been puzzled between the two envelopes, which on being compared were certainly found to be very much alike; but when the Doctor received the letter handed to him as his own, and pocketed it as such, the man naturally thought there could certainly be no cause for uneasiness in the matter, and he said nothing.

"What am I to do now?" Doctor Seymour asked at last, in a helpless, despairing tone.

Miss Pemberton laughed. "I will send Ellen down to give you her answer," she replied. "I really must go upstairs now, and write my letter."

When her epistle was finished, and sent off to the post, she returned to the sitting-room. The Doctor was still there. Ellen was again in possession of her rocking-chair, and Pussy was happy on her lap. The scene was a very peaceful one, and the new-comer saw at once that the much talked-of proposal had now been properly urged in the right quarter, and had been accepted. "How could I ever have imagined we were going to be a pair of cross old maids?" she mentally ejaculated; but she was outwardly very proper and sober over the affair, and offered her congratulations with due solemnity. It was quite impossible not to feel just a little hungry, however, so she asked the Doctor to stay and have dinner with them, as it was ready, or nearly so. This invitation, and a subsequent one—that he would at least return to tea—had nevertheless to be refused, as he suddenly remembered that there were at least fifteen patients to be seen before midnight.

Perhaps it was, after all, as well that he could not spend the evening at the house, as the second post arrived just then, and with it came a note from James Compton, who very humbly and properly expressed much gratitude for being forgiven for not having done something of which he was wholly ignorant. If permitted, he would come to tea, and bring his secret in his pocket. He then hoped to hear the whole history of the practical joke. He professed great admiration of the feminine mind and genius, but he was sorry to be obliged to state.

that in this case he thought these powers had led his fair relatives astray, in making them conceive that even the superior abilities of a man were equal to the task of disproving connection with the unknown.

The ladies pocketed some of their just indignation against the offender, and greeted him with civil dignity for the sake of his secret, which was in due course produced in the shape of a wedding-ring, having the name of the future wearer engraved within its rim. "This is quite a conclave of family secrets," Miss Pemberton remarked, with blushing pomposity. "We have two to communicate also, being both engaged to be married, as well as you; but as the gentlemen are not by, our mysteries cannot be revealed so gracefully as your story has been."

"I have told mine with a whoop," Jim observed, with assumed innocence. The outrageousness of this pun did much to reinstate him in his cousins' good graces, and they both gave him their warmest congratulations. After awhile, quits were cried on both sides, although Jim stood out long and valiantly, but vainly, for the history of the practical joke. It was never told him.

The two ladies were married to their respective husbands on the same day, and have lived happily ever since.



SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI.

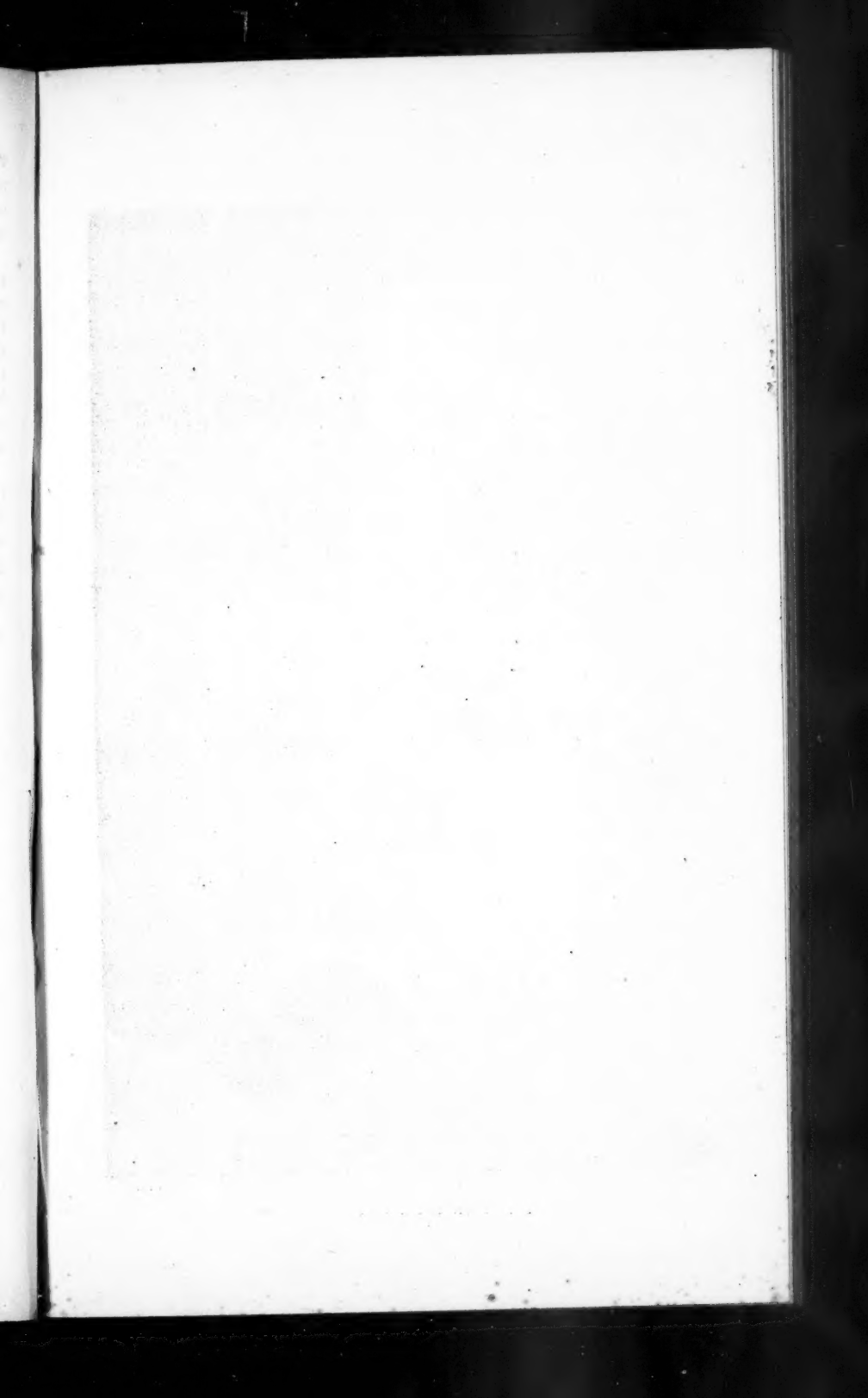
AND now sweet summer dies ;
 Ah me ! to think of all the golden hours
 We passed, when first to life she sprung,
 And strewed our pathway with her choicest flowers
 And lulled us with the magic of her tongue
 That whispered in the breeze ; or louder sung
 As Philomel, till every fibre swung
 In rapturous pleasure known but to the young.
 Such happy past rememb'ring, who but sighs
 For summer, vanishing. Too soon she dies.

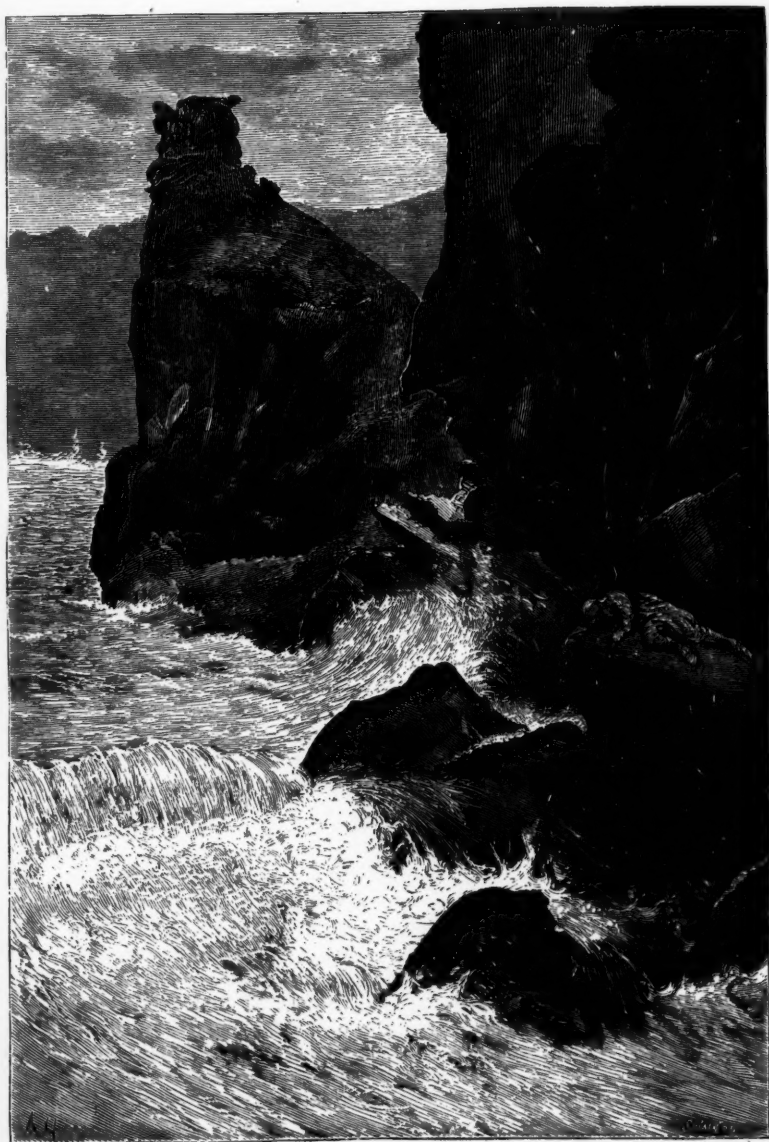
But some say, Wherefore weep ?
 Summer returns.—True, but not this, not this ;
 Granted, the earth may wake again
 To life and beauty, 'neath the ardent kiss
 Of yet another, which shall doubtless reign,
 Lavish of fruits, and flowers, and blessed grain,
 Now nurtured with her smile, now with her rain ;
 But for *this* summer we shall grieve in vain.
 Once dead for ever dead ; the days of yore,
 To hearts that ache with longing, come no more.

No skies will be so bright ;
 At least to us, who gazed on those of June ;
 Beheld the West with light aflame ;
 Then waited for the rising of the moon,
 That later like a saintly spirit came.
 No fairer morns the glowing East will claim,
 Nor rouse the lark to spread Aurora's fame ;
 What future summer days can be the same ?
 Of all that wait our mortal path to cheer,
 What equal to the past, what half so dear ?

And therefore do we mourn
 Out of our life the sweetest chapter done ;
 The very fairest page gone by.
 There could not be a happier one
 Tho' we are aged ere we come to lie
 In Death's embraces ; be he far or nigh,
 We always must remember, you and I,
 These halcyon days departed, brief as bright—
 This summer which is dying as I write.

S. E. G.





A. HOPKINS.

J. SWAIN.

ALONE ON THE ROCKS.